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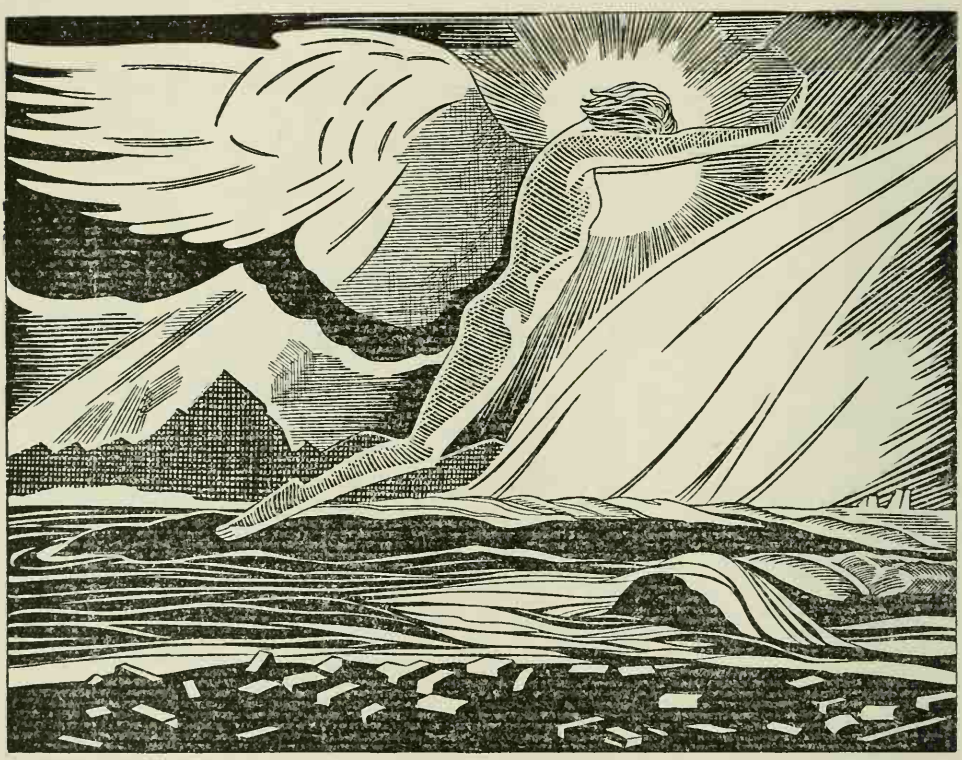

[*Drawn by Gladys Sullivan from the painting, The Fire Bird, by Rockwell Kent.*]

See page 189.

FOUR LEGENDS OF BRITTANY

Edited by John Heard

From studies of ancient documents and other material collected by (the late) Thorndike Nourse

I. THE ANCIENT CITY OF IS.

How it was destroyed, and how Grallon, its King, fled away; together with somewhat of the Princess Dahut, King Grallon's Daughter, and of the Strange Prince from the Orient.

The ancient city of Is, renowned in legend, has been variously placed by historians. Probably it was not far from the Cap de la Chèvre, which guards the northern entrance to the bay of Douarnenez. Tradition tells us that it was a beautiful city, albeit low and flat; that it contained superb palaces, public buildings, handsome houses, and large docks and warehouses. As the city was built at some distance off the coast, and was below sea-level, it was surrounded by immensely strong walls. The docks and warehouses were its outer defenses against the sea; within them came a broad sheet of water like a moat, and within that, the inner wall upon which ships discharged their cargoes. Still inside of this wall came another broad sheet of water, and then the innermost wall of enormous strength and thickness. The entrances were protected by huge double gates. The moats or basins could be emptied only at low tide. Obviously, ships could enter only when the level of the water was the same both inside and outside the walls, for there were no locks. Within the inner basin ships of all sizes could lie at the wharves. As the city was circular, these moats served not only as defences, but added charm to the setting. It lay like some magnificent jewel in a sparkling, rippling sheen; in a circle of burning gold, and the rays of the sinking sun bade it a slow good-night. Under the darkling skies the water in the moats turned a dull steel blue and in it were reflected the gilded domes and the towers of

the palaces, the bright façades of the public buildings, the monuments, and the green oases of gardens and parks.

Here King Grallon, rich and powerful, had established his residence. For Is was a fair spot to which to retire from the arduous duties of governing the turbulent Bretons and from the strain of his many battles. Surrounded by his nobles and their fair ladies, his courtiers and his household, Grallon lived in a state of oriental splendor. Behold the King, clad in his scarlet robes and with the silver key, which alone could open the water-gates, suspended around his neck by a golden chain, and his fine long white hair falling over his shoulders!

The song writers, the poets and the legends of Brittany tell us that "the superb city of Is boasted of every luxury, and that within its walls all kinds of happy debauch were practiced for the delight of its inhabitants." Here dwelt opulent merchants who dealt with far countries; the water front swarmed with sailors of every nationality; hither came the buyers and sellers from foreign lands as well as those from Brittany and France; Is gathered within its walls men of wealth and learning, courtiers, parasites, adventurers; Is was the city of voluptuousness, of sensuousness, of elegance, of pleasure; and to its amusement-loving people day and night neither began nor ended.

In vain did the friends of God, in vain did the most saintly saints preach eloquently against Is, the modern Sodom. In vain did even Saint Corentin preach within its walls. All the entreaties and the most appealing Latin exhortations of the good Saint Guenolé failed to move an unrepentant populace.

Princess Dahut, the beautiful daughter of King Grallon, knew no modesty. Forgetful of that moderation generally attributed to her sex, she set the example of every refinement of sensual depravity.

But the hour of retribution had struck. Only from that calm which sometimes precedes a storm might a warning of the approaching tempest have been drawn. Song, music, love, wine, and wild orgies were the divinities to whom this people made worship. To them life was but an uninterrupted sequence of sensuous delights.

Not so King Grallon. In his ears sounded the voice from Heaven. Regularly he went to Mass and earnestly he conferred with his constant companions, Saint Corentin and Saint Guenolé. Even so, he was powerless to influence his subjects or their com-

panions from strange lands. Finally Saint Guenolé, fired with an enthusiasm like unto that of the prophets and sybils of old, spake thus unto the King:

"Sire, this is the day of disorder; the right arm of Eternal God is raised; soon will He smite thee and thy people. Behold, the sea is rising, the Spirit of Retribution rides on its waves. Your beautiful city of Is will be swallowed up. Its people will not be awakened; they will not cease from their orgies; reason is a stranger to their heated brains. All delay, all efforts to save them are but madness. Better that they perish, they who have scoffed and who have scorned our warnings, our entreaties, our prayers. There is yet time; let us go; follow me!"

Fair was the night; the deep blue firmament was studded with twinkling stars that in turn sparkled in the waters of the moats which surrounded the silent city. Vessels, great and small, and from far distant lands, lay at their moorings or against the wharves. No breeze ruffled the water. Sleep lay on the city of Is, save perhaps on the rich merchant reclining on his soft couch, with a fair girl in his arms, dreaming of love, of new ventures and of great profits. But to the guests of the Princess Dahut, sleep seemed but a stranger and a thing remote. Sounds of revelry rang from the windows of the palace. Clear sounded the ring of clashing golden goblets; loud echoed the music of the dance, for Dahut—Princess Dahut—was presiding at her nightly revel. Near one of the entrance gates she had built for herself a fair palace wherein were marble, gold and silver and sweet cedar wood from far Lebanon. There, queen of the pleasure loving nobility of her father's kingdom and from abroad, she made a crown of her vices and her seven pages were garbed to represent the Seven Cardinal Sins. Each night she chose the handsomest of her guests and to him she gave a mask and a countersign whereby he might gain access to her room, high in one of the towers. Together they remained until the earliest cries of the sea-gulls floated over the sea. And then to her lover of the night spake Dahut, Princess of Is: "Sweet, if thou lovest me, and if thou hast found happiness within mine arms, this much I ask of thee. Lest thou be recognized, and in the eyes of the guards I come to shame, I pray thee, put thou this helmet upon thine head that none may know thee nor perceive whence thou comest." "That, an I will," quoth the knight, still enraptured by the joys of the night. And so, with her own fair hands the Lady Dahut encasqued him with the helmet,

and bade him be gone. But thereupon his breath came short, and he was strangled and he died. And Dahut clapped her hands and a huge black eunuch appeared who laid the knight across his shoulders and cast him into the bottomless gulf between Huelgoat and Poulaouen. And thus it is that the victims of Dahut's love are wont to haunt those places where, once, in the city of Is, they had loved and died. And so, still, they come back to a fair spot, which in later times was in a forest not far from Arthur's camp where Arthur's chamber was; and, when all the world is still, cries and laments issue from that wooded place.

On the night of which we tell, the revels of Dahut were more than usually lavish and unrestrained. For Princess Dahut was hostess to a Prince who had come, as he said, from the furthermost Land of the Rising Sun to worship at her feet. He had sailed across the sea to Is in an eastern ship of great richness and beauty. With a large retinue and with several banks of rowers; with sails of silk studded with precious stones had he come. And the prow and the hull and, over all, the deck where was his divan were fair ablaze with diamonds and rubies. And of the two he loved the ruby best, for, as the galley passed swiftly into the port it seemed a living crimson flame. And it glowed the redder in the rays of the sun, which, slowly, sank into the western sea.

This Prince from the Lands where the Sun Rises was tall and his eyes were black and flashing, and, lo, he could make them fixed and hard as his heart commanded. Richly was he dressed, and nobly he wore a magnificent mantle caught at the shoulder by a great ruby clasp. And on his lips there played a sweet, sweet smile, and, again, almost before the smile was gone, the cold, grim grin of death. And it was the way of Dahut that all those on whom she smiled became as soft wax; but on him, this Eastern Prince, her smiles were as arrows on the walls of a stone keep. At his smile, her might was wasted, and before him she was as water; and the proud princess, who claimed homage from all, became a weak and yielding maiden.

To herself and to her companions she had long made boast that naught was written in the Book of the Law of Sin which she did not know, and yet when she listened to this Prince of the East she was astonied by the greater knowledge he had than she or her companions had in what sin might be. All that human malice had discovered since the world was made, and all that it was to discover in the years to come, he knew. To him all

the dim secrets of Nature were as a plainly written page. He knew the name of every fish that swims in the deep sea; he knew every beast that roams the earth, and the fowls of the air; the stars he had numbered and their paths he had traced through the vast firmament. Well versed was he in the dark arts and he claimed to be proficient in the performing of prodigies of magic and of sorcery. Then, that she might make test of his skill, Dahut offered him a golden goblet; and she held it out to him in her beautiful hands. The stranger did but touch it with his signet ring and the cup broke into a thousand pieces as it had been of glass, and the wine boiled up like sea-foam as if it fell upon the table, and it flowed down as it were streams of living blood. And all the company of revellers cried out in fear at this manifestation of the Prince's power.

And the Prince laughed, and to calm their fears he proposed to teach them a new dance. His offer seemed as magic, for hardly had he uttered the words than each member of the company sprang up as if the prey of the God of Lust, and, closely entwined, danced away in a demoniacal embrace, their feet scarce touching the floor. Faster—faster—faster—and they were aware of no giddiness nor of any weariness.

And while the others danced, slowly the Prince drew near to Dahut. Then he had no hardness in his eyes and he looked at her with the soft and eager smile of a lover. Gently his lips parted and his words fell upon her ears as sweet music.

"Lady of loveliness; sweet Lady mine, Dahut," said he, "I pray thee, follow me. Thou wast not made for such cold climes. Come, for the lands which are the birthplace of the Sun lay claim to thee; there, and there only, can thy beauty shine in all the fullness of its glory; there, and there only, canst thou set thy foot on every heart. A palace there awaits thee far grander than this den of fierce barbarians; a palace, the richness and splendor whereof shall surpass thy fondest dreams."

Her cheeks glowed and her brow flushed, but, perverted though she was, Dahut remembered that she was still the daughter of her aged and kind father. "No," she cried, "I cannot leave him. I cannot go; he is old; I am his only child and I must not abandon him!"

But already the Prince knew her better than she knew herself and calmly he replied:

"Remain if thou preferest. Remain, then, in thy miserable climate with its cold and blustering winds, thy barbarous

people and thy debauched companions. Never shalt thou behold the East, never shalt thou know how pure is our sky, how fair our nights. Never shalt thou idle away thy time in the shade of waving palms and stately cedar trees, nor shalt thou ever breathe the perfume of flowers besides which the fairest which grow in this land are but as weeds. Alas, thou shalt never know the sweet freshness of our arbors where the cool waters leap high in the air and fall again in dewy showers into basins of porphyry and of gold. I would have taught thee the secrets of their magic, and like me thou could'st then have worked miracles. 'Tis but one short hour since thy cheek paled at the sight of the broken cup and the leaping blood. Adieu, Dahut, the Fair; lovely thou art yet unworthy to be my companion. Adieu!"

The stranger fell silent and Dahut rose trembling and in great fear.

"I will see this East of thine," she almost screamed. "I will follow thee to the ends of the earth. I fear neither God not Devil, nor man."

A gleam flashed in the stranger's eyes as he heard her words.

"Come, let us go," continued Dahut, "let us leave at once before it is dawn; to-morrow it may be too late."

"Gladly would I go immediately," said the Prince, "but there is no water in the port and my ship is fast aground. We must wait till morning, or else open the sea gates ourselves that sufficient water may enter in to float my vessel."

"I will not wait for morning," Dahut cried out imperiously. "My father carries the key which opens the water gates. But canst thou not with thy wondrous magic command them to open without the key?"

"Stands there not a cross, a crucifix, above the gate? Before that my art is powerless. Dahut, be thou as brave as thou art fair and let us together go and obtain the key by whatever means we may; for, if we fail then must we contain ourselves and await the morning light."

Dahut hesitated, but the stranger looked long and fixedly into her eyes and her will melted like wax before a hot flame. And her passion for this man from overseas was too strong for her to withstand and she resolved to seek her father and if need be to steal the silver key of the great sea gates.

King Grallon lay sleeping in his apartment, high in a distant tower. His robe was of deep purple; his white beard covered

his breast and his long hair lay like a bank of snow around his shoulders. Great was the majesty of this ancient man as he slept upon his couch. Dahut, his daughter, hesitated. The strong love for her father and the fierce passion for the strange Prince battled mightily within her. But perceiving the silver key which shone through the old man's snowy beard her passion won the mastery and with feverish hands she seized it. Although she wished to press her lips to her father's brow, she dared not, and without a backward look she fled, and passing swiftly from the room, she fell into the arms of the Prince who awaited her.

Lest she have time to reflect on what she had done, he dragged her along the corridors, past the dancers still whirling in the mad dance he had taught them, and rapidly he crossed the small bridge which connected the palace with the water-gate. The night was dark and the tide was rising. Great waves hurled themselves against the walls and spray dashed high above and over the parapets. The wind rose until it howled, and the ocean roared for its prey. For an instant Dahut stood aghast at what she was about to do; the Prince, seeing her hesitate, whispered in her ear, and Dahut cried out as if his words had stung her. She made as though to open the smaller gates, but, "No," said he, "open the large gates, for the water must come in with great speed if we are to escape before sunrise."

Slowly but firmly the young Princess turned the key; the great gates opened before the weight of the water rushing in. No human power could have closed them again. The sea hurled itself in with supreme force, and with a roar which rang through the doomed city. Fear at what she had done fell upon Dahut and she screamed and cried out to the stranger to save her, but there was no stranger, and her cries were answered only by mocking laughter, and she saw a ship—as it were a ship of flame and of red smoke—sail swiftly through the gates, and, although the wind was strong and contrary, it sailed out and disappeared on its course toward the Land of the Rising Sun.

"Sire," cried Saint Corentin, as he rushed into the King's bed chamber, "all that which I prophesied has come to pass. Arise, let us go, for there is yet time. Take what thou hast that is most precious and let us hence with all speed, for God has abandoned this accursed city to the Devil." Saint Corentin seized the box containing that of the King's treasure which was most easily carried, and continued to urge the old monarch to greater speed. Grallon rose quickly and in great fear, and

called to his servants to bring him his horses, and when he and Saint Corentin had mounted they set out together. Sinking their spurs into the flanks of their horses they galloped toward the gates, but not before Dahut had time to spring up behind her father. And so they plunged into the rushing sea, the horses snorting and panting, the huge waves rolling and leaping upon them with savage fury. Wave rose upon wave higher and higher; louder and louder howled the wind; only at times did the horses' feet touch the bottom, but they continued to gallop, and fought desperately to reach the distant shore.

God's hand had fallen upon the city of Is. The people roused from sleep, shrieked with fear and agony. Sailors sought their ships only to be dashed against the walls of the moats and against the sides of the houses as the tide rose. Multitudes climbed to the roofs but many were drowned in their houses because of the speed with which the water entered in. Some even climbed to the top of the church which had been unused for so long that the sexton had lost the key. Corpses floated with the flood, and those who had managed to reach the church steeple had but a short time in which to contemplate the fate that awaited them. Some tried to escape by swimming but were cast against wreckage of all kinds and soon perished. Even King Grallon as he rode was surrounded by the dying and the dead, which wind and tide tossed toward him.

Suddenly above the screaming of the tempest rang out a loud clear voice, crying, "O King! if thou wouldst save thyself shake from thee the demon thou carriest at thy crupper."

And there be some who say that King Grallon obeyed and so drowned his daughter; and others there be who maintain that Princess Dahut heard the voice and cast herself into the sea that her father might be saved; and again there be those who hold that Satan leaped down from his throne and seized Dahut to carry her off to his regions of darkness and despair where there is no hope. Be all that as it may be, the beautiful Princess disappeared near the spot which in after years came to bear her name—Poul-Dahut*—but which in later times has come to be called Pouldavid. And it is also said that she was changed into a mermaid and that on moonlight nights she sings ever among the ruins of the drowned city. And her eyes are like two stars, and her hair is the color of bright gold, and her neck and breasts

*Dahut's Hole.

are as white as the purest marble, and sweet is her voice and soothing. But when sailors hear her singing they cry out to each other in great fear; "Let us away, for it is time to seek the harbor. Dahut has come up from her palace, and when she rises from her palace she brings with her a storm. If we delay we shall be dashed on yonder rocks and shall sink into the long sleep."

As soon as Dahut had disappeared into the sea the tempest ceased, the sea became calm, the wind died away, the sun rose bright and red over the horizon; and King Grallon and Saint Corentin reached the shore. When they looked back only a few of the towers of the city of Is remained above the sea and these soon sank beneath the waves. At the spot where Grallon's horse first reached the land there was a flat rock upon which it stepped, and where the stallion set his foot his hoof sank into the stone and even unto this day in the great rock of Garrec the imprint may still be seen.

And not far from the spot where King Grallon first set foot upon the land he and Saint Corentin came to the place where now stands the Abbey of Landevennec* on a small promontory, overshadowed by high wooded hills, at the junction of the rivers Aulne et Faou.

And when years had passed, it was to this place that King Grallon came once again, this time accompanied by Saint Guenolé. As he crossed over the summit of the sacred mountain of the Menez-Hom, he perceived the fires of a pagan sacrifice in the valley of the Faou, on the spot where now is Rumengol, in Breton called Ru Men Goulondeiz, which means Red Stone at the Break of Day. So overcome was he by what he saw that he made a vow to destroy that place of worship of the idolaters and to replace it by a Christian temple dedicated to Notre Dame, the Mother of Christ.

Thus King Grallon and Saint Corentin rode on, and in time they passed a rock which in years gone by had been consecrated by the Druids to a heathen deity and on which these heathen

*It was in the Abbey Church of Landevennec that King Grallon was buried, and his tomb is there to-day. It was situated in a small, low and dark chapel and consisted, as did all tombs prior to 800 A. D., of a simple sarcophagus or coffer of stone on the cover of which a large cross was carved. In later times the following epitaph was cut into the stone band encircling the sides of the chapel.

Hoc in sarcophago jacet inclyta magna propago
Gradlonus magnus Britonum rex mitis ut agnus;
Noster fundator, vitae coelestis amator,
Illi propitia sit semper virgo maria.
Obiit anno domini CCCCV.

people used to spill the blood of young children whom they sacrificed. King Grallon kneeled down before the stone and prayed. When he had finished he exclaimed: "By the Mother of the true God here will I build a church in honor of the Holy Virgin!" This afterwards he did, and likewise he built an Abbey connecting with the church, where he abode with Saint Corentin and Saint Guenolé and led a pious life. And here, when many years had passed and when he was heavy with years, he died in the arms of Saint Guenolé, and as he passed away he murmured: "May God receive my spirit; Madame Mary, intercede for me that my soul may be saved."

II. SAINT CORENTIN AND THE FISH

In the year 375 of Christ, there was born a Priest who later lived to be the Patron Saint of all the western part of Finisterre. When he was still a young man he became embittered against the world and built himself a hermitage near a small spring in a forest in the parish of Plou-Vodiern, and there he also built a small chapel. Unknown and retired from all human conversation, he fasted and he passed his days and nights in prayers and orisons. But God, Who never forgets those who for His sake quit all earthly intercourse, cherished him and saw to it that no harm came upon him. And by God's grace the young Priest was also fortified against all attacks and temptations of the Devil, and was made strong and upheld in sanctity.

And that in his solitude this Priest of His should not die, God performed a thing most wonderful. For notwithstanding that the good Priest on occasion received from the poor neighboring peasants a few morsels of bread which, with certain wild herbs and roots that nature produced without aid from man, sustained life within him, God sent a little fish into the spring which flowed hard by the hut in which he dwelt. Every morning the fish rose to the surface and presented himself to the Priest who took him from the stream and daily cut from the fish's side a portion of flesh sufficient for his needs, then casting the fish back into the water. And the fish dove and disappeared and when again he rose to the surface no wound nor scar could be found on the spot from which the Priest had cut his day's meat. Then on the following morning again the fish rose to the surface

that from his side the good Priest might take what he needed to sustain his life. So day followed day in pleasant peace, and the Priest continued his holy life and lacked not.

The powerful King Grallon had risen to the throne of King Conan-Meriadec and with all his court lived in the city of Kemper-Odet, as in those days men named the city which was the chief city of the county of Cornouailles in Finisterre.

But in years after the place has been called Quimper and still is to this day. And this city stands on the banks of the river Odette which flows through the very middle thereof. Furthermore it is from Quimper but a short day's journey to the bay of Douarnenez where, in former times, was King Grallon's fair city of Is, which, as all men know, perished in the sea.

One day the King, with all his court and a host of huntsmen and servants, went a-hunting in the forest of Plou-Vodiern. After a day of dolorous work in which the King had taken no game, he found himself near the hermitage wherein dwelt the good Priest. Esteeming that he would take great store of game, no meat had been packed upon the beasts of burden, and so, having slain naught in his hunting, the King and his court became enhungered and fain would have eaten.

So, when they came to where dwelt the Priest they avoided their saddles and cried out asking whether he had aught which they might eat. "Yea, verily," replied the Priest, "bide ye but a little and I will set food before you." So while the King and all his court waited, the Priest betook him to his spring and when he was come thither the little fish rose to the surface. The Priest took him gently in his hand and, before all the people, cut from the side of the fish a piece of flesh which he gave unto the cook, saying: "Prepare this for thy master and for all the company."

But the royal cook laughed at the Priest, saying that even one hundred times as much would not suffice to satisfy the hunger of the King and of his men. Then, as the Priest made no answer, the cook began his work, thinking that perhaps his master alone might have enough for a single mouthful. But great was the astonishment of all the people when they beheld the bit of fish, the moment it was placed upon the fire, multiply itself into a great number of pieces, enough abundantly to satisfy the entire company.

When the King beheld what the Priest had done, he desired to see the little fish from whose side had been taken the wondrous piece of flesh. So the Priest led him to the spring and there the

King saw the fish swimming, and there was no wound in his side. But one of the King's varlets, a rude fellow, sprang forward and cut another piece of flesh from the side of the fish, but that wound in no wise would heal and the water was red with the blood which flowed. Then the Priest stood forth and without rebuking the varlet, spoke a benediction over the injured fish and commanded him to disappear lest he suffer more at the hands of the King's men. And the fish slowly sank into the spring, and the wound healed as the King watched, and the water became as clear as before.

So amazed was the King by what had taken place before his eyes that he prostrated himself before the hermit and then bestowed upon him the entire forest and a manor house in the parish of Plou-Vodiern. And on a later day the King sent for the Priest to come to Quimper to dwell, and in the after years the Priest became the patron saint of that city. But as all men know this Priest was Saint Corentin, and he built the cathedral of Quimper, which is one of the fairest cathedrals of all France. And for that reason is it that Quimper is often called Quimper-Corentin in honor of the Priest, and his tomb is near the altar.

III. SIR GRALLON AND THE QUEEN AND THE LADY OF THE STREAM

Grallon, although he was not of the blood of the Kings of Armorique, belonged to a family of illustrious warriors. Great was his beauty and, furthermore, he was valiant far beyond the most valiant of his people—who were reputed brave beyond their fellows. Seeking that fame which comes only from the performance of lofty deeds of courage, he entered the service of Witol, King in the land of Léon, who was then waging war against Kuncar, King of Cornouailles. Witol gave Grallon command of a portion of his army and Grallon made such cunning use thereof and gave manifold proofs of such courage that many times he brought victory to his King; and his King, in turn, esteemed him above other men, and made him his friend. And thus it came about that word of his beauty and of his prowess reached the ears of the Queen herself. And she felt a great desire to behold and to hold converse with one who was a hero in the eyes of all.

So, being pricked by curiosity, this Queen bade her Chamberlain come to her, and of him made inquiry: "Tell me the

truth. Tell me who is this Grallon whose praises have come to be a burden in mine ears? Knowest thou him?" "Gracious Queen," replied the Chamberlain, "Wit ye well that he is of a fair countenance, brave and withal courteous, and that he is loved by all." "So, for a long time now, my heart has told me," sighed the Queen, "bring him before me. I will make of him my friend and to him will I give myself for love."

The Chamberlain made haste to find Grallon, well-knowing that such glad tidings would overjoy his heart; and having found him he told him that the Queen bare him great love and desired that he come to her forthwith. And Grallon made haste and followed the Chamberlain to the Queen's apartment where he found her alone, and without the company of her ladies. So, when the warrior stood before her she went forward to meet him, took him in her arms, kissed him upon the lips, and then made him to sit beside her on the couch. Then she began to entertain him with sweet talk and with many tender looks, which no man could fail to understand. But the Knight Grallon thought only of what he owed unto his Lord and Master, the King who had covered him with so much favor, and he replied only by respectful expressions, feigning that he did not perceive the sentiments which enflamed the heart of the Queen.

At the first she was impatient and mortified that the Knight chose not to understand her; for it was humiliating to her that she had openly declared her love to this Sir Grallon who sat cold and unmoved beside her. Thus, that he might come to her by his own wish, if not by force, she asked what lady of the court was his mistress, and if she loved him truly, for, indeed, she declared, he was deserving of great love; and then the Knight Sir Grallon made confession to her that never had he known the joys of love.

Right glad was the Queen to hear these words, for thereby was her desire so increased that she did not hesitate to abandon herself. She opened her heart without reserve to this strong knight and made avowal that since in all her days she had felt but a weak love toward her husband she now found she must know true passion. And overcome with this desire, she confessed that she had cast her eyes upon her court that she might discover the knight most versed in valiant and in gentle arts. "And thou, Sir Grallon, art that one."

But Sir Grallon was distraught for he was not smitten of love for the Queen. Wherefore he made testimonial of his

gratitude for such an honor, but also said that since he had sworn fealty to his King, to whom he owed so much, never could he be guilty of such dastardly disloyalty. So saying, he bowed low before the Queen and withdrew from her presence.

Great as was the shame and anger of the Queen, nevertheless her passion was so strong that she could not abandon hope nor desist from her designs. Hence she deemed her end might be best served could she by many acts of graciousness and by many honors soften Sir Grallon's heart. She caused magnificent presents to be sent to him; many times she summoned him to come to her, and even wrote him letters with her own hand. But all availed her nothing, for staunch was the loyalty of the Knight from Armorica.

When Witol's Queen saw all her wishes pass unnoticed, her advances disdained, and her hopes come to naught, her love was turned to hate. Then began she to speak evil of Sir Grallon, and she cast about how best she might encompass his downfall. Nor was it long ere she attained her desire. For soon, because of the evil things she spake concerning Sir Grallon, the King turned his favor from him, despoiled him of his riches and high offices and banished him from the Court into his own domains where he lived but poorly. To charm away his sadness and as a diversion from the sorrow which such injustice caused him, Grallon spent his days wholly in hunting, and often throughout the night riding in the great forests which in those times covered the land of Brittany and wherein the wild beasts had their lairs.

Then on a certain day as he rode slowly, his head bowed with grief and with many sad thoughts, a hind whiter than the snow sprang up and fled swiftly away. But to Sir Grallon it seemed that the hind was wounded. And as the Knight rode after, the hind kept just beyond the reach of his spear, yet close enough to make him follow the more eagerly. Nor could he overtake her nor she escape. Thus for many leagues did Sir Grallon ride through the forest glades until he came to a fair field through which there ran a small clear brook, in which a fair damsel bathed herself. So fair was she that no poet skilled in the use of sweet words might ever truly tell of her beauty, so great it was. Her robe was embroidered in gold and it was hung in a tree nearby together with other garments very richly wrought. And on the bank of the stream there sat two nymphs who were her hand maidens. When they beheld Sir Grallon these maidens

were affrighted and fled away. Yet when the Knight beheld how many and great were the charms of the Lady that bathed and how wondrous fair was she withal, he thought no more of his sorrows nor of the hind which he had followed after. Lightly Sir Grallon leaped down from his horse, for at first he bethought him to take the clothes of the Lady that she must perforce come to him if she would regain her garments. But she called to him, crying out that only a recreant Knight would do so evil a deed. And with shame he became aware that she spake truth and when she bade him do so, he brought the garments to the water's edge, and betook him a little way into the forest that the Lady might robe herself at her ease and not be shamed by his presence. But anon he returned and carried her off into the forest where, since they were alone, he sought to have his will of her, beseeching her the while to share his love. But the Lady steadfastly refused him his desire, and then Sir Grallon, forgetting those laws of Knighthood because of which he had declined the favors which the Queen of Léon had entreated him to accept, by force had his will of the fair damsel, even though she withstood him as best she might. But scarce had he had his will of the damsel than shame overcame him and on his knees he pleaded for forgiveness that he had allowed his passion to overcome him so that he had forgot the laws of Knighthood. And in his defense he pleaded that never before had he proved the pleasures of love, and he sware unto her that he would henceforth be her Knight forever. And wicked as the Knight had been, yet was he young, gentle and withal handsome, so that the Lady soon forgave him, and with a tender kiss sealed the reconciliation. Then the Lady avowed to Sir Grallon that it was only to bring about this result that she had made use of the adventure with the hind that had led him to the stream in which she bathed. Then, after many times that they had had great joy of each other, and when they had exchanged sweet and solemn vows, the gracious Lady left Sir Grallon, but said at parting: "Wit thou well, Sir Knight, that when again, and as often as thou may desire my company, surely I will come to thee, if thou divulge not, and if thou keep secret that we meet and have joy one of the other. But if thou shouldst in any wise or to any person make mention of me, then, by the blood of our Savior, never shalt thou see me more."

Then Sir Grallon betook him home as one bemused. And when he reached his castle he found a noble horse at the gate, richly harnessed, and it was led by a varlet who told him the

name of the steed was Gadifer, and that it was a gift from the Fair Lady of the Brook. And together with the horse she had sent him armor, richly wrought, and apparel, finely embroidered, and a coffer full of gold.

Sir Grallon was overjoyed withal and deemed that Fortune smiled upon him and thus, for a long time, he continued in great content. Each evening he had but to wish and the Fair Lady came to him. Thus a year passed, and no desire of his but was fulfilled until from the very excess of this good fortune an end came to his happiness.

On a certain day of high festival, King Witol summoned all his court to his castle of Pencoat and he bade come to him all the lords of Cornouailles and Sir Grallon he summoned too. And King Witol was seized with a strange wish. Proud was he of possessing in the Queen, his wife, the most beautiful woman of his Kingdom, and when the evening repast was finished and the wine began to flow freely, he bade her come into the high hall and there take her place upon a throne. Then he commanded his noble guests to behold her beauty and to say if, in all their days, they had ever beheld a woman that might in any wise be compared in beauty to his Queen. On the last day of this festival she appeared as usual and the hall resounded with the loud praises of the assembly where all cried that never on this earth had there lived a woman more beautiful.

But Sir Grallon was silent and said nothing. He bowed his head and smiled, for he bethought him of his own Fair Lady. The King and the lords heeded not his silence, but the jealous eye of the Queen perceived it none the less. "Look," said she to her husband, "all render homage to my beauty save only one man, and he insulteth me, and verily that man is the man thou didst love, for it is that Sir Grallon whom thou hast heaped with favors. Did I not, long ago, make complaint to thee regarding his perfidy and his ingratitude?" Whereupon the King was wroth and cried out to Sir Grallon, and summoned him by his allegiance to give the reason of his silence and of his insulting smile. Respectfully the Knight made answer that always had he been aware, as had everyone else, of the Queen's wondrous beauty, but that yet was he convinced that there existed in the world a woman still more beautiful than King Witol's Queen. And when the King bade him make answer whether he knew such an one, the unhappy Knight forgot the oath he sware unto his Lady and at last told the assembled lords and ladies that he

did know, in effect, a damsel who was a thousand times more lovely than the Queen. Then the King in his fury ordered Sir Grallon to bring hither this damsel so that her beauty and that of the Queen might be compared, and if the damsel brought by Sir Grallon was not as fair as he averred, then should he be punished with grievous torments.

And the King bade Sir Grallon seek this lady whose beauty he so boasted and bring her before the Court. But, alas, how in any wise could he find her? Sir Grallon hied him to the stream where first they had met, and he rode throughout the forest crying out to her and beseeching her that she come to him. Only the echoes and the rushing winds made answer; and the Lady was no wise to be found. Nor when he cried aloud telling her of the danger wherein he stood, and when he besought her to forgive him, would the Lady come to him.

The period of grace accorded him by the King had expired and Sir Grallon was unable to make good his boast or to produce his fair Lady, so King Witol gave order that he be seized and thereupon condemned him to death. But as the executioner was about to let his axe fall, lo, the Fair Lady came unto them. And she bade all stand back and Sir Grallon she carried off in a chariot drawn by two very large and fierce dragons.

And she bore him into the forest and there she told him that in kindness she had been willing to save his life, but that never would she forgive him in that he brake the oath he sware unto her and that never again could she love him more. And the Lady vanished into the deep forest. And great was Sir Grallon's woe and he sprang upon his good horse, Gadifer, and followed after the damsel, for fain would he have overtaken her. Finally, on the very spot where they had first met, he caught up with her, but she leaped into the water and was not to be seen. Sir Grallon sprang after her into the stream, for rather would he die than lose her who of all things in this world was dearest to him, but the damsel had pity on him and drew him from the water and placed him on the bank, but told him that never should he see her again. Thereupon Sir Grallon was exceeding sorrowful and would once again have thrown himself into the water, but that two nymphs came up to him. Their hearts were made soft by his great woe and by the great love he bare unto his Lady, so that they pleaded earnestly for his pardon until the Lady at last relented and held out her hand to her lover, pressed him to her heart, and so in great love and happiness they journeyed

home to Sir Grallon's castle, and dwelt therein in joy until both, on the same day and together, after many, many years, lay them down to die.*

IV. THE MONK WHO FELL INTO THE RIVER

In the whole monastery there lived no better monk, nor any who was more highly esteemed of all, yet the more merit a man hath, the more doth the Devil seek to ensnare him; and so did this poor Priest find to his cost. On a certain day, as he walked in the cloisters of the Abbey, pondering whole-heartedly on holy matters, of a sudden he saw a lady pass along, and to his great surprise he felt himself overcome by a great and burning love for her. From then on, throughout the long nights, he could dream only of her and of her beauty, and surely he thought he would die unless she would take pity on him. And he repeated this to her so often and so ardently that, in the end, she consented to receive him, at night, in her house. But it was so that the only way by which he might enter unperceived was to cross the river which washed against one side of her house. And over this river he could pass only by walking upon a narrow plank. So when the night was dark and when all slept, he ventured forth and soon came to the plank. Some there be who say that he stumbled, others that he was suddenly overcome with sickness, but all are agreed that he fell into the river and was drowned.

Hardly had his soul left his body when the Devil seized upon it and prepared to carry it off to Hell; then, swiftly, an Angel appeared and strove to snatch the soul away from the Devil; and, lo, each pulled amain, and each cried aloud the claims he made for that monk's soul.

"Without reason nor justification dost thou dispute with me over this soul which I am carrying to Hell," said the Devil. "Knowest thou not that when a man first sets his foot upon the

*This is the legend told in a poem composed in Breton during the sixth century in honor of Sir Grallon. In the following century the same subject was treated by other Armorican bards, but the principal character was changed, and the scene of the Court was transferred to that of the famous King Arthur, at Camelot, at that time King of the Lyonesse.

Until less than a hundred years ago there existed in the chapel at Landevennec the tomb of Saint Guenolé, first abbott of this monastery, who died March third A. D., 448. This tomb, like that of Sir Grallon, was a simple sarcophagus of plain stone, supported on pilasters about two feet high. It was destroyed early in the nineteenth century. Saint Guenolé was born in the Lyonesse at the chateau of Les Guen. His father's name was Fragan, and his mother's name was Guen.

path of sin, his soul belongs to me? This monk was entering upon the broad road of sin, and in fact, he was attempting to sin when I found him. He sought to commit a wicked act and in that sin I caught him. Does not even thy God say: 'As I shall find thee, so shall I judge thee?' In sin found I this monk; the path in which he walked proveth it so; no other proof is required; to every sin its punishment; thus in advance is he condemned."

And then the Angel of God cried aloud: "Nay, for that cannot be. Than he no monk in the whole monastery led a more pious life; a life holy and pure; no sin was there in him. In the Scriptures it is written, and both right and just it is, that every good work shall receive its reward, as also shall every sin receive its punishment. Thus should this monk be repaid for the good he hath done. Else wherein would lie the merit of these good works were he to be punished for a single fault? And bethink thee, too, that never did he commit this sin for which thou hast seized upon his soul. True is it that he left his monastery and that indeed he came to this plank, but how knowest thou that he might not have returned whence he came had he not fallen? Thus he hath committed no sin, therefore he cannot be punished. Wouldst thou judge and condemn him for a thought, for one thought, even though it was sinful? Thine is the error, hence leave his soul in peace and go thy ways. But if thou refusest, then, that this struggle between us may end in amity, let us betake us to King Richard, thou and me, and let us abide by his decision of the matter. Fairly will he judge, for never hath he given false judgment."

And to the Angel the Devil made answer: "To that will I consent. Place thou the soul between us."

And immediately they went before King Richard, who was in bed in his chamber. And the Angel and the Devil told him of the matter and of how it stood between them. How the monk had been moved by a great love, but that that love had not been fulfilled; how he had fallen from the plank and had been drowned in the river. And having spoken, the Angel and the Devil besought the King that he pronounce judgment as to which of them should have the dead man's soul.

Having heard their plea, and after he had pondered, King Richard replied, "Go quickly; put the soul back into the monk's body, and withdraw it from the water. Let him be neither deceived nor taken unawares, but place him gently upright upon the plank. If he advances by one step, one inch, one nothing,

thou, Devil, shalt take him. But, if he shrink, and retire backward, peace be with him."

And the Angel and the Devil found no fault with King Richard's decision, and quickly restored the soul to the body from which it had been withdrawn, and the monk who had thus been restored to life, was placed upon the plank.

But no sooner did he perceive where he was than instantly he stepped backward with one foot, quicker even than a man who treads upon a serpent, and then he fled swiftly as though he had seen the Angel of Death standing before him. They that were holding him loosed him, and made no attempt to hinder him. Straight ran he to the Abbey, and there threw off his clothes, sprang into bed, and lay shivering with fear, not knowing for sure whether he was alive or dead.

On the next morning, when King Richard arose and went to the Abbey to pray, he summoned all the monks to him, and bade the monk who had sinned step forth, and that monk came forward with his gown still wet and be-muddied, for he had not had time to dry nor clean it; and he had no other. "How farest thou, brother?" said the King, "and how findest thou thyself after thine adventure? If again thou undertake to walk over that plank thou shouldst take greater care that thou fall not again into the river. And now confess all to the reverend Abbot; tell him what was in thy mind to do last night."

The poor monk hung his head and lowered his eyes in shame as he stood before his lord and his Abbot, but having confessed all, namely, what happened to him at the plank; how the Devil tried to lead him into sin; and how the King had saved him. And Richard, the King, testified to the truth of all whereof the monk had spoken. And so the story became known, and so the adventure was divulged, and from it in after years men came to say: "Gently, gently, my lord monk, and have a care as thou crossest the plank!"

Site Muine, suef allex,
Al passer planche vous gardex.

MISTRESS SHAKESPEARE

A TRAGI-COMEDY IN ONE ACT*

By Conrad Seiler

"Oh, ye gods,
Render me worthy of this noble wife."
—*Julius Caesar, II: 1*
"Man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion."
—*Much Ado about Nothing, V: 4*
"Being a woman, I will not be slack
To play my part..."
—*Henry VI, Part 2, I:2*
"It's an honourable kind of thievery."
—*Two Gentlemen of Verona, IV: 1*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Anne Hathaway Shakespeare
Will Shakespeare
Richard Burbage
William Kempe
John Heminge

Time: *Late summer, 1599.*

Place: Will Shakespeare's *home in Stratford-on-Avon—the living room. Fireplace, settle, stools, a few chairs, a sideboard, a heavy Elizabethan table; a window and two doors.*

Before the curtain rises, a male voice is heard, speaking hesitantly:

The Voice. Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more;
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea and one on shore—

(*The curtain rises.* Shakespeare *is discovered, quill in hand, at the table. He looks very much like a composite study from the famous Droeshout original, the Ashbourne portrait, and the bust in the Holy Trinity Church at Stratford-on-Avon—but, indeed, somewhat younger, perhaps thirty-six. He hesitates, in the throes of composition, frowns, looks up meditatively, then slowly repeats the three lines, stops, his voice trailing in the air. He sucks the end of his quill, and looks down at the manuscript before him.*)

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SHAKESPEARE (*repeating*). One on shore—one on shore—A murrain on it! (*He suddenly throws the quill to the table, rises, and fulminates against himself.*) Thy wit is more lumpish than the Queen's! (*He takes the manuscript in his hand, seats himself, and tries once more.*)

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more:
Men were deceivers ever:
One foot in sea and one on shore—

(*Suddenly, from outside, three male voices, singing stridently off key, begin softly at first, as though approaching from a distance, then grow in volume:*)

THE VOICES. And let me the canakin clink, clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink!
A soldier's a man,
And life's but a span.
Why then let a soldier drink!

(SHAKESPEARE *listens attentively. His face brightens. He puts down his quill, and thrusts the manuscript under a large empty platter. The voices become louder:*)

King Stephen was a worthy peer,
His breeches cost him but a crown;
He held them sixpence all too dear,
With that he call'd the tailor lown.

(SHAKESPEARE *runs to the door and flings it open. Crescendo in singing.* RICHARD BURBAGE, WILLIAM KEMPE, *and* JOHN HEMINGE *enter boisterously, still singing.* BURBAGE *is very much the admired Elizabethan actor—upstanding, tall.* KEMPE *is small, a bit corpulent, and has a quizzical, absurd face; he is the foremost comedian of London.* JOHN HEMINGE, *rather effeminate in appearance, is pathetically lean and nondescript.* SHAKESPEARE *embraces* BURBAGE.)

SHAKESPEARE. Richard—Burby! God's me! How came you hither?

BURBAGE. On the wings of love and an old mare's back! God ye good den, my lord!

SHAKESPEARE (*effusively*). And old Kempe and Heminge. Save you sweet bloods! You surprise and beguile me to the very brink! I bid you all hearty welcome! (KEMPE *and* HEMINGE *bow in mock solemnity, their right hands to their hearts.*)

KEMPE. Gramercy, your lordship!

HEMINGE. A thousand welcomes yourself, Lord William!

SHAKESPEARE. Art hungry, honest gentlemen? Thirsty?

KEMPE. God-a-mercy! I almost die for food and drink! Look you, good my lord, look you this! (*He tenderly pats his sizeable paunch.*) How thin and hungerly withal! Not a drop nor morsel hath entered this sad, yawning abyssm since we departed London. I do beseech you, my lord—

BURBAGE. He lies, Will. We have come within this hour from a huge-full hogshead of stout, two whole capons, a leg a mutton, and three pecks of peascods—all served at the Falcon here in Stratford by as sweet and swag-bellied a wench as e'er ministered to three empty play-actors!

SHAKESPEARE. You came unattended?

BURBAGE. Save by these rogues and the rest of His Lord Chamberlain's Players. We left the others at the cross-roads. They're housed safe in Warwick now.

SHAKESPEARE. In Warwick? I understand you not. What serious preferment brings you to Stratford?

BURBAGE. To see the orgulous Shakespeare, save your grace. (BURBAGE *bows.*)

SHAKESPEARE. Nay, sneck up, thrice-reputed liar! Come, tell me true: is aught amiss in London?

KEMPE. O much, sir! London hath too many men, and, therefore, too many bawds with ill-starred children! (*He suddenly breaks into song:*)

O William was an orgulous lad,
He once writ "As You Like It;"
It drove the groundlings in Shoreditch mad,
And they cried, "Od's blood, let's spike it!"

(*He capers about, dancing round the table. They all laugh.*)

SHAKESPEARE. Take care, sirrah, I'll garter my hose with thy guts!

KEMPE. Thy hose, sweet William, is too scurvy a rag for such gentle employment. Fetch a string of pickled herring; 'twill do.

SHAKESPEARE. You have a harsh and unruly tongue, Kempe.

KEMPE. I am a man, my lord—in faith, a properer man than Heminge is a woman.

SHAKESPEARE. Nay, you are a knot-pated loon!

KEMPE (*shrugging his shoulders*). 'Tis the same: man, loon —loon, man—as you like it, sweet cousin! (*He sings again:*)

O William was an orgulous lad,
He once writ "As You Like It"—

(*He takes a flagon, partly filled, and sniffs at it.*) Ah—wassail for the worthy! What wilst thou, friend Heminge—claret, sack, Madeira, alicant, muscadine, or brown bastard? Come, be wightly, merry gentleman!

HEMINGE. An' it please you, Master Knave, I'll take claret, sack, alicant, muscadine, *and* brown bastard!

KEMPE. Nay, fair sir, we have no brown bastard, no cony-catcher, nor cut-purse till William joins our company—gentle William! (KEMPE *drinks the entire contents of the flagon.*)

SHAKESPEARE (*To* BURBAGE). Tell me, Burby, what brings you to Stratford, and the rest of the players to Warwick? Methought you were all bound direct to Bristol and Marlborough this month's expiration.

BURBAGE. Wouldst thou know, Will? (BURBAGE *takes a paper stamped with an official seal from his hat.*) Behold, a garish and judicious reason! See you—His Lord Chamberlain's Players have been summoned by his lordship, the Earl of Pembroke, now in Warwick, to play in a laughable tragedy and a tearful comedy before him and the assembled gentry.

SHAKESPEARE. Lord Pembroke—most excellent! 'Twill mean a heavy purse. He is the heart of generosity. But he hath play-actors of his own, Burby.

BURBAGE. Ay, 'tis true. But a worser band of rude, penurious and debauched mechanicals, with not one word apt, ever strutting and fretting, their faces bedecked with whelks and bubuckles, thou hast ne'er seen! There is no man in the whole heathenish crew well-graced enough to look the lady or play a simple bawd. They attaint the stage whereon they amble. Nay, Will, his lordship, for the nonce, fain would see true masters of the player's craft—His Lord Chamberlain's Players the best in all England. (*He makes a grandiose gesture.*)

KEMPE (*still draining the flagon*). True masters of the craft! Go to, thou art a finical, affectioned antic, Burby! True masters! Trillibub! All players, as I am a gentleman, are true masters of vice, teachers of wantonness, spurs to impurity, the spawn of idleness, and so long as they live, we needs must loathe 'em!

BURBAGE. Caitiff, hold your monstrous tongue!

KEMPE. That is a man's work, good sir. You ne'er could do it. The truth, dear Burby, is an unsavoury bite to liars. I do despise liars. Ergo, I proceed: Players—play-poets, stage-players, country comedians and interluders—are heathenish, lewd, foul toads and most pernicious corruptions. And stage

plays, gentle Burby—stage plays are the inventions of the devil himself, the blossoms of vanity engendered in filth, the root and substance of apostacy, the food of iniquity, riot and adultery—detest them, as thou art a Christian! (*To* SHAKESPEARE, *very urbanely*) Hast writ more plays, William?

SHAKESPEARE (*ignoring* KEMPE). What plays, Burby, shall you give in Warwick?

BURBAGE. A pleasant comedy called, "Love's Labour's Lost," by one William Shakespeare, Gentleman, and a marvellous good play—"The Spanish Tragedy."

SHAKESPEARE. That halfpenny's worth of dung?

BURBAGE. Which mean you, Will?

SHAKESPEARE. You know the one.

BURBAGE. Master Kyd's tragedy hath had more gallant success than any play writ by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Dekker, Nash, or that prating coxcomb, Ben Jonson.

SHAKESPEARE. Which proveth the giddy rabblement hath no brains.

BURBAGE. Brains or no, Will, they must be cozened and beguiled, for our bellies must ne'er be empty. (*Pause.* BURBAGE *looks about the room.*) How does the mistress, Will?

SHAKESPEARE. She is well. She visits with her mother, in Shottery. She returns betimes, before night.

BURBAGE. And the children?

SHAKESPEARE. Judith and Susanna abide with Dame Arden, their aunt, of Coventry, for a holiday. I am alone, Burby. The servants have gone to the fair.

BURBAGE. Hast been in Stratford for long, Will?

SHAKPESPEARE. A fortnight.

BURBAGE. When go you to London again?

SHAKESPEARE. A few days hence, when my new play is writ—"Much Ado about Nothing."

KEMPE. That's a dreadful thing to have so much ado about.

BURBAGE (*after a pause*). Will, 'tis passing strange to me: you write no plays in London. I do remember none.

KEMPE. Beshrew me, Burby, 'tis so! He hath writ no plays in the old town. And worse, ere one word is mended in a play—an' it be but a "but" or a "button"—away to Stratford hies little William! William loves Stratford—dear William!

SHAKESPEARE (*looking away, as though curiously embarrassed*). The high noise of the coaches and the cries of the disordered

rabble distract my fancy in London. The fine instruments of thought are dulled with sound.

KEMPE. In faith, Sir William, you speak a lie, a white, a damned lie!

SHAKESPEARE (*brusquely*). What mean you?

KEMPE. Stratford hath no quiet for a man with a wife about.

SHAKESPEARE. Kempe, I am married to a woman which is as dear to me—

KEMPE. But, prythee, sir—and here's the rub—she's not so dear to live with you in London town! A touch, a touch, I do confess! (KEMPE *pretends to make a homeward thrust with an imaginary rapier.*)

SHAKESPEARE. She would not live in London.

KEMPE. Durst not, mean you? (KEMPE *mounts a stool and strikes a mock-heroic attitude, then turns to* HEMINGE.) Come, John, lend me thy gentle, big voice! (*The two men sing*; KEMPE *beats time with a candle stick*:) On Saturday morning I breakfast without—

HEMINGE. Hey nonny, hey nonny, non nonny!

KEMPE. A scolding wife and a brawling bout—Ready, John!

HEMINGE. Hey nonny, hey nonny, non nonny!

KEMPE. Now I can enjoy my bottle and friend—(BURBAGE *joins in*:)

BURBAGE *and* HEMINGE. Hey nonny, hey nonny, non nonny!

KEMPE. Methinks I have made a rare week's end—

OMNES. O hey nonny, hey nonny, non nonny!

KEMPE. Fie, Burby! You play havoc with a tender and beauteous melody! By my troth, your voice is like a rheumy toad's, with a wheezing lung!

BURBAGE. Mark you, puppy, my voice is the glory of the English nation!

KEMPE. God save the nation!

SHAKESPEARE. Good or bad, Kempe, thy singing hath brought on a nipping thirst.

KEMPE (*bowing*). A compliment, good my lord! Kempe's singing hath ne'er caused better news than this!

SHAKESPEARE. Heminge!

HEMINGE. I am here, sir.

SHAKESPEARE. In the cellar, Heminge, is a cask of Strat-

ford small ale, of goodly brew. Here is the key. The quart-pots hang in the hall.

KEMPE. Marry, Heminge must be helped to it! He is of full noble stock and breeding, but his capacity is extreme. I'll admonish him! (*To* HEMINGE.) Come, fellow, your bergomask! Now, on thy life, keep a manly stride! Come! (KEMPE *hums a dance tune, interlaces his arm with* HEMINGE'S, *and they dance out. As they do so, the other door slowly opens, and* ANNE HATHAWAY SHAKESPEARE, WILL SHAKESPEARE'S *wife, stands on the threshold. She is eight years* SHAKESPEARE'S *senior, not good-looking, but with a pensive, striking countenance, and deep, eyes, reflective perhaps of life's pathetic ironies. She wears the customary tight-fitting bodice, a farthingale, lace ruff, wide sleeves and a hood. She removes her hood, then stands immovable in the doorway, looking at the boisterous pair dancing off, and at her husband and* BURBAGE, *who have their backs toward her. The badinage and laughter of* KEMPE *and his companion are heard off, intermittently, and continue until their next entrance.*)

BURBAGE. By Heaven, Will, Kempe doth sour my thoughts and leave me in doleful dumps, unfit for good usage!

SHAKESPEARE. He hath rare qualities, Burby. He is a great good player, and can expound a lusty knave and an honourable wench in the same play. God wot, he hath brought a deal of zealous laughter to this sad world.

BURBAGE. Not more than you, Will, when you played old Adam. Though 'twas a serious part, the groundlings laughed till their sides did split!

SHAKESPEARE. And what rash-levied strength hath Kempe! I wonder on it—when he danced the morris from London to Norwich.

BURBAGE. Ay, but he's a devil, and spews forth more venomous slander than a hundred fishwives. (*Pause.* SHAKESPEARE *glances toward the door where* KEMPE *and* HEMINGE *left. He then draws his stool near* BURBAGE *and speaks intently in a low, confidential tone.* ANNE *remains at the other door.*)

SHAKESPEARE. Burby, what news?

BURBAGE. News? Quotha, man, I have been whistling off all the important business 'twixt here and London! News? I have no more news, insatiate fellow!

SHAKESPEARE (*as before*). Mary—Mary Fitton?

BURBAGE. Ha—a maid and a man! No more a maid—

SHAKESPEARE (*with ill-disguised eagerness*). Hast seen her, Burby?

BURBAGE. Ay—twice or thrice.

SHAKESPEARE. She is well?

BURBAGE. She is well—a few days older, but no maid nor maggot can stay that. She is still exceeding good to look on—methinks a paradise of sweet flesh. (*Pause.* BURBAGE *smiles.*) There *is* news, Will. I'll play no more with you. I'll divulge a proper secret. Wherefore comes friend Burby to Stratford? Hearken all: he is Cupid's fond messenger! (BURBAGE *takes a small embroidered handkerchief from his hat.*) Know you this, Will? Look you: 'Tis no common weave. Smell it! . . . Soft, soft, it smells most sweetly—the heady perfume of roses and musk and love! 'Twill make you reel with delight! . . . Nay, nay, be moderate! (SHAKESPEARE *rises and snatches the handkerchief from* BURBAGE.)

SHAKESPEARE. Give it me! It's from her! (*He presses the handkerchief to his lips.*) Where is she? Where is she?

BURBAGE. What, wouldst behold the pretty baggage in the twinkling of an eye? Thy curiosity, Will is fraught with madness—yet, not so mad. (*Pause.*) Mary Fitton, rash man, is near!

SHAKESPEARE. In Stratford?

BURBAGE. Nay—in Warwick, scarce ten miles apart.

SHAKESPEARE. Heavenly powers, is it true?

BURBAGE. 'Fore Heaven, it is—as true as we are, flesh and blood. She came with the players, attired like a boy. She fain would come straight away to Stratford: but I advised against it. You have a wife, Will, and wanton dalliance must be sauced with some discretion. (*Laughter off.*) Soft! Kempe and Heminge have no part in our confidence. (*Pause.*) I have a message for you—from her.

SHAKESPEARE. A message? Speak, speak!

BURBAGE. Nay, but you must not be distraught, my lord!

SHAKESPEARE. Tell me!

BURBAGE. In good season. Contain yourself, Will; this fever ill becomes you . . . Know you the tale of the innkeeper's daughter? 'Tis a merry tale and a long one. Well, 'twas on St. John's Eve: the maid was in the tavern—

SHAKESPEARE (*seizing* BURBAGE *by the neck*). The message, whoreson dog—the message, or I'll kill thee!

BURBAGE (*smiling, releasing himself*). I say, sirrah, don't choke me, or I'll ne'er tell more! You are too unpolished.

SHAKESPEARE. The message!

BURBAGE (*slowly*). The message is—

SHAKESPEARE. Ay, ay—!

BURBAGE. The message is—'tis but a simple and shallow message! (BURBAGE, *still smiling, speaks very slowly*:) Mary Fitton waits for William the Conqueror!

SHAKESPEARE. Is this counterfeit?

BURBAGE. Nay, my heart on it.

SHAKESPEARE. She waits—for me! Mary—Mary! (*He again presses the handkerchief to his nostrils, his lips.* ANNE *partly closes the door, but still remains, listening.*)

BURBAGE. Come, allay your ecstasy in a measure, good Will. I do almost repent I told you. (*He crosses to* SHAKESPEARE.) Wilt come to Warwick with us?

SHAKESPEARE. O for a winged steed!

BURBAGE. That's a fearsome creature, Will, a monstrous creature! With what haste we can—on a common galloway nag, sans wings—you'll win Warwick and Mary in an hour!

SHAKESPEARE. O sweet, O heavenly hour! (ANNE *lowers her head, puts her hands over her eyes, then quietly shuts the door and disappears.* KEMPE *enters through the other door, wiping his mouth with his jerkin.* HEMINGE *follows. Each carries two large canisters of liquor. Both men are slightly befuddled.* SHAKESPEARE *carefully folds up the handkerchief, kisses it, and puts it up his sleeve.* KEMPE *and* HEMINGE *sing.*)

KEMPE *and* HEMINGE. Ale, ale, ale!
Wherefore should man bewail
Death, or pain, or troubles sore,
Where there's such a bounteous store
Of ale, ale, ale!

(*The two men march round the table and place a canister before* SHAKESPEARE *and* BURBAGE.)

BURBAGE (*standing, looking at* SHAKESPEARE). To success!

KEMPE. To William Shakespeare—the great and complete gentleman!

HEMINGE. Amen! (*They all drink; but* SHAKESPEARE *barely touches the cup to his lips.*)

BURBAGE. The day grows old. We'll wait upon your pleasure at the Falcon, Will. Then on to Warwick (*in a loud whisper*)—the very minute bids thee!

SHAKESPEARE. Warwick! I'll be with you anon.

KEMPE. Is that his intent?

BURBAGE. Ay, to see His Lord Chamberlain's Players. What say you, Will?

SHAKESPEARE (*from the top of his mind*). 'Tis good sometime to live happy and say nothing.

KEMPE. Faith, why not? What is life with no sweet nor honeyed converse—?

BURBAGE. Hush! You prattle out of fashion. This grand liquor hath gilded you, Kempe . . . Anon, good will! Fetch a cloak; the air bites shrewdly.

HEMINGE. God 'ild you! (KEMPE *and* HEMINGE *look curiously at* SHAKESPEARE, *who seems unaware of their existence.* KEMPE *begins to sing very softly the drinking song he used on his first entrance. They all go out, leaving* SHAKESPEARE *alone.* SHAKESPEARE *stands like one transfixed: his head is raised, his eyes closed, his hands clasped tightly before him.* KEMPE'S *singing dies away in the distance. Silence. Then the door opens slowly.* ANNE *again stands on the threshold. She looks at* SHAKESPEARE *for a moment without moving, then enters. The shutting of the door brings her husband to earth.*)

SHAKESPEARE. Anne! You are here in good time, for 'tis time to part! I must to Warwick this very night. Lord Pembroke would speak with me upon some weighty business. Burbage is there with the players. I am sorry for it, sweet; I fain would stay with thee tonight. But I'll not tarry long: I'll return betimes in the morning . . . You are not angry, lass? By Heaven, I swear I had rather remain! But when lordlings speak, commoners must obey . . . Come, kiss me, my lady. (ANNE *moves slowly toward her husband; her face is expressionless. He kisses her forehead.*) Anne, be a gentle wife, fetch my lugged boots—the new ones of russet cloth—the blue cloak—thou knowest it, lass, with the silver thread—my silken garters, and my blue copatain, the one with the embroideries and white feathers. (ANNE *crosses slowly to the door.*) O Anne! (*She stops, but does not turn.*) A clean ruff, my best gloves and sword. And Heaven bless you! (ANNE *goes out.* SHAKESPEARE *fastens his jerkin, smooths out his hose, then his hair and beard. He finds a hand mirror and looks at himself, smiles, and then sings*:)

Sing care away with sport and play,
For pastime is our pleasure:
If well we love, for naught we care,

In mirth consists our treasure.
Let stupids lurk and drudges work,
We do defy their slav'ry;
He is a fool that goes to school,
All we delight in's brav'ry.

(ANNE *re-enters with the clothing.* SHAKESPEARE *sits on a stool while she helps him into his new attire. He sings:*)

What doth avail far hence to sail,
And lead a life in toiling?
Or to what end should we here spend
Our days in irksome moiling?

It is the best to live at rest,
And take 't as God doth send it,
To haunt each wake and mirth to make,
And with good fellows spend it.

(ANNE *slips on* SHAKESPEARE'S *new boots. She holds his coat for him, hands him his sword, his hat and gloves. He hums the same melody, looks down at his legs.*) A pleasing leg, eh, wife? The clothes become me well, think you not so? All finery must be worn before his lordship's censuring eye . . . O, in troth, I had almost forgot! Anne, as you're a fair and gentle woman, I beseech you, a paltry favour—to-night, when I am gone. You know the new conceit you've writ for me? Here it is! (*He takes the manuscript from under the platter.*) It's a goodly, glorious work for a woman to have writ—better far than the other plays, Anne—and I'm proud of thee. 'Twill bring twenty pounds at the Globe, an' the weather bids fair. But methinks, Anne, it must have another madrigal or two. 'Tis no great matter, and thou canst do it. Ay, lass, thou canst. You have writ all the other plays, Anne—all save the bawdy speeches which tickle the groundlings' dull wits . . . Here is a ditty. I did begin it. 'Tis nothing, but it may stir up and provoke your thought. Prythee, do it, Anne, and in the due course and process of time bountiful fortune will smile on us, and I'll buy the fine silk for a new cloak, and Judith and Susanna bright dresses. Two songs more, and the play is finished and perfect. Methinks we'll give it at the Globe within the fortnight. Kempe shall play Dogberry—'twas made for him. Heminge can play Beatrice—he makes a comely woman. And Don Pedro shall be Burbage's part. 'Twill be a wondrous, rare play . . . Wilt do it for me, Anne? (*He takes* ANNE'S *face between his hands, and kisses her again—*

this time on the lips. She turns away.) Thou art good to me, lass! . . . 'Tis getting late. His lordship waits. Good night, sweet Anne—good night, good night! (SHAKESPEARE *crosses to the door, humming to himself.* ANNE *watches him, immovable. As he reaches the door, the handkerchief sent by Mary Fitton slips from his sleeve, and falls to the floor. He does not see it:* ANNE *does. He goes out.* ANNE *slowly crosses the scene and picks up the handkerchief. She looks at it, then drops it on the table . . . In the distance, the clatter of horses; shouts from* KEMPE *and* HEMINGE. *The noise recedes, and then ceases . . . It gradually becomes darker.* ANNE *sits down before the manuscript. A streak of fading sunlight illumines her. She looks at the song, then takes up the quill and reads aloud in a low, uncertain voice*:)

ANNE. Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more;
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea and one on shore—

(*It has become dark, save for the light from the doorway and the window.* ANNE *stops, looks at the handkerchief, hesitates a moment, then writes and slowly reads in a trembling voice as the curtain begins to descend*:)

Men were deceivers ever,
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never.
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny—

(*The quill falls from* ANNE'S *hand. She closes her eyes. Her head sinks to the table, and she sobs.*) Will! Will!

CURTAIN

EXPLANATORY NOTE TO "MISTRESS SHAKESPEARE"

A few literate persons have asked why the foregoing play was ever written. What reason was there for presenting Mr. William Shakespeare in such a questionable, not to say, forbidding light? Should anyone let his fancy run riot?

This criticism is entirely unjustified. *Mistress Shakespeare* is not only historically accurate, but is rendering simple justice where it has so long been due—to Anne Hathaway Shakespeare, the glory of womankind. William did *not* write Shakespeare: Anne did. The evidence is overwhelming, and the author has it all. During the last four years, he has accumulated literally a ton of data, which he will gladly present before any scientific body for critical examination. Pending this action, he is now giving the world a summary of his epoch-making discoveries.

First of all, there is the distinctly feminine tenderness of the sonnets and the love scenes of the plays. No man *could* have written them. He never had it in him. They are palpably a woman's work. The female characters in Shakespeare— Rosalind, Lady Macbeth, Titania, Hermia, Miranda, Portia, Ophelia, Queen Margaret, Desdemona, etc., etc.—are drawn with too delicate, too imaginative a hand for a man; and the male characters, with few exceptions, are too truthful, limned with too great a fidelity to nature for male authorship.

The plays themselves imply a keen and responsive intellect such as no mere actor-manager could have had. They are unmistakably feminine in their amazing intuitive veracity. We could quote hundreds of individual lines and situations to prove Anne's clever authorship, but the reader can find them for himself.

The question occurs: If Anne wrote Shakespeare, why did she hide her authorship? For the very obvious reason that women—outside of the reigning family—in Elizabethan days, and many days before and many days since, were consecrated either to the bearing of children or the pleasure of man. Culture in woman was not merely frowned upon, but was considered the acme of moral perverseness. Anne was not strong enough to confront the malediction of her age.

The greatest and most conclusive evidence of all, however, is the new cryptogram, discovered by the author in the spring of 1930, when he was in Stratford-on-Avon. This discovery was nothing short of astounding, as will presently become apparent,

and will bear rather detailed description, if only for posterity's sake.

After visiting the Stratford parish church, containing Anne's remains and William's, then the grammar-school, the old Guild Hall, Anne's cottage at Shottery, the forest of Arden, "the poet's" house in Henley Street, and other places of interest, the author, who is a person of unique and unexpected impulses, suddenly felt the need of violent exercise. At an ironmonger's, in Rother Street, he bought a small shovel for 2 s. 6 d. And in a field, just south of Southham's Lane, beneath a spreading willow-tree, he began to dig a hole of considerable depth. No sooner was he experiencing that indefinable exhilaration that comes from honest toil, when the shovel struck something that felt singularly like a large rock of some kind. He carefully unearthed it, and found a flat circular stone, three feet in diameter and two and one-half inches thick. After the earth was brushed off, a series of indecipherable numbers and letters met his mystified gaze. They were chipped in the stone in the curious calligraphy peculiar to Elizabethan and Jacobean times. We are reproducing the cryptogram *in extenso:*

L. L. L.—TITPA

2-6. 7.
3-3. 5.
6-23.
7-6. 8. 2. 16.
8-3. 15.
9-4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13.
8-3. 8.
10-1. 7.
9-4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13.

CUT. BUR. 1598

T. H. H.—TITPA

2-3.
4-4. 11. 16.
6-5. 6. 8. 26.
8-39.
9-1.
5-3. 19.
6-3. 4.
5-10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 18. 20.

N. L. I. T. 1603.

S. S.—TITPA

6-16. 17. 18. 21.
1-1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11.
1-1.
2-1. 2.
4-2.
1-2. 5. 10. 11.

T. T. 1609

The author instantly knew that he had discovered something. But what?—that was the question. His whole body trembling with emotion, he dug down still farther, but nothing came to light but a broken pewter jug, a rusted tin can, the handle of a velocipede, and a few worms. By this time, several townfolk had gathered and were looking curiously at the author and his excavations. He thought it best to fill up the hole and hurry back with his prize to the Falcon Tavern, where he was staying.

For days, weeks, months, the author read the cryptogram over and over again, looking for the key. And the more he read, the less he understood. He turned it upside down, tried to read it at an angle, half angle, sideways. He worked out every conceivable plan to decipher, but the results were precisely nil. He consulted all his scholarly friends. They knew less than he. A famous Egyptologist said it was a humbug.

One day, when the author had almost decided to give up in despair, he happened to be visiting the British Museum. He was casually looking over several photostatic copies of the first editions of the work imputed to William Shakespeare, when suddenly he had a thought, the thought became an inspiration. With quivering hands, he took from his inside pocket a copy of the cryptogram and compared it with the title pages before him. *And everything was revealed*!

The author shouted like a madman. The curator called the police. The author flung his arms round the embarrassed officers, and soundly kissed them . . . That same night, in an institution in Tooting Bec, he realized that he had made one of the most incredible discoveries in the history of mankind.

* * * *

At the end of the year, when he was released, the author went over his discovery to examine any possible contradictory evidence. There was none. The undeniable facts were these, (the reader is asked to refer to the cryptogram reproduced above): "L. L. L."

was *Love's Labour's Lost;* the mysterious "TITPA" was of course merely Title-page; "CUT. BUR." was the publisher of the first edition of the work in 1598—Cutbert Burby. Similarly, "T. H. H." was *The Tragical History of Hamlet;* "N. L. I. T." represented N. L. and John Trundell, publishers of the first quarto in 1603. "S. S." stood for *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, and "T. T.," for the unknown sponsor of the first edition (in quarto), which appeared in 1609.

But now comes the most revelatory part of the entire cryptogram. The first column of vertical figures represents the respective numbers of the lines on the title-page of each work, counting from the top down; the succeeding horizontal figures, reading from the left to the right, on the separate lines, refer to the letters of the words that the *true* author of Shakespeare wished to have spelled. Thus:

A
PLEASANT
CONCEITED COMEDIE
called
LOUES LABORS LOST,
As it was presented before her Highnes
this last Christmas.
Newly corrected and augmented
By W. Shakespere.

Imprinted at London by W. W.
for *Cutbert Burby.*
1598.

By reading the letters designated—the sixth and the seventh letters in the second line, the third and fifth in the third line, the twenty-third in the sixth, and so on—we have:

A-N-N-E H-A-T-H-A-W-A S-H-A-K-E-S-P-E-R-E
W-R-I-T S-H-A-K-E-S-P-E-R-E.

The Hamlet reference is similar. When solved, the cryptogram relating to the *Sonnets* reads:

A-N-N-E S-H-A-K-E-S-P-E-A-R-E W-R-I-T
S-H-A-K-E-S-P-E-A-R-E S-O T-H-E-R-E.

As if this were not conclusive enough, on another trip to Stratford, a year ago last summer, the author again visited Anne's cottage at Shottery. It was still in an excellent state of preservation, but near the lintel of the back door there was a stone missing. The empty space was of a peculiar circular shape. The author

asked about it. The caretaker shrugged his shoulders and said it had been missing for at least a century and a quarter to his personal knowledge. Thereupon, in a perfect frenzy of excitement, the author flew back to the tavern, seized the Southham Lane Stone—as it is now called—which he always carries with him, and hurried back to the cottage. *The stone fitted exactly*! . . .

Then , for the last time, the author stood beside the chancel of the parish church, where lie Anne's remains. He looked at the simple inscription; his heart overflowed with tenderness, and he said with prophetic fervour: "O worthy, worthy woman, thy day hath come!" And then, without even glancing at the monument to William, he hurried out.

* * * *

The author has established the Anne Hathaway Fund for the purpose of forcing the authorities of Trinity Church to remove William's bust and replace it with Anne's. Any monies, jewelry, gifts, stocks, bonds, or legacies will be gratefully received by the author, who may be addressed, care of his publishers.*

*For a more exhaustive analysis of the Hathaway-Shakespeare Controversy, consult the author's following works—still in manuscript: *The Great Imposter: A Critical Examination into the Perfidy of William Shakespeare*, vol. 6, pp. 982-2,046. *Anne Versus William, or Who Did It?* vol. 28, pp. 2462-8787.

THE CHANGE

By Vigliano Zullo

Rich in the ways of men, but poor in clothes;
Haggard as a schooner that a squall
Has hit; drooping shoulders that were tall
And oaken once; yellow eyes that chose
No other eyes to look at save maybe those
Of children; speaking in an ancient drawl
Whose breath had claret mead and purple gall,
He never mentioned either friends or foes.

"What pity to be so alone," I said:
"Better not be born, or to be dead."—
One night I spied him on a howling road:
Mercurially and majestically he strode
Toward the dawn; and once, on stooping low,
He picked a blossoming ruby from the snow.

THE JOY OF POETRY

By C. H. Williamson

It is the function of the literary critic, as distinct from the aesthetician, to value literature in terms of the needs of his times. In determining what those needs are—what literature *means* for him and his contemporaries—he will perforce adventure, unconsciously or consciously, into aesthetics; and his findings, expressed in the nature of his sensibility as a critic, provide the focus of that perspective which corresponds with his and their demands from literature. Over a period the demands that a people makes of poetry may be roughly constant; and in that period the values of various critics will conform within the limits of individual temperament. It is when the general aesthetic, the conception of the *use* of poetry, changes that there is need of a critic able to reassess the whole tradition in the new perspective.

Like radium, the influence of great poetry goes forth perpetually and in various forms, while the substance remains essentially undiminished. Great poetry, the very greatest, may be freshly interpreted, age after age, and may even yield meanings never dreamed of by those who wrote it. Euripides, for example, could not foresee that Gilbert Murray would make of his tragedy *The Trojan Women* a vital commentary on the horrors of war in the twentieth century. No more striking illustration of the inexhaustible nature of great poetry could be imagined than Mr. Fausset furnished in his profound interpretation of the life and works of Wordsworth. While not altogether new, it is original, because it is the outcome of intense absorption, extensive knowledge, and profound conviction. However sceptical one may be of biographical studies that arrange the heterogeneous facts of a person's life to support a theory or exemplify a philosophy, there is no denying their effectiveness, if they are made honestly.

Of the many perversities that have afflicted the intellects of aesthetes, none was ever more mysterious than the belief that it is the nature of poetry to be meaningless, and that its pure essence might be revealed by neglecting the common uses of words. There is only one country in the world where an absurd idea is hypnotically pursued to its logical conclusion and then solemnly exhibited in an act. In that country, needless to say, this nerveless paradox was conceived and hatched. The whole

strength and the whole tradition of art and literature in England are against it, as they are against every other high-flown abstraction. There are not enough clever people over here to keep aesthetic phantasies afloat. Nevertheless, a kind of rabies or rage takes possession of us occasionally because of our sheer innocence. An epidemic sets in, like measles in the Indies, and every head is turned.

The poetry which we have inherited, and which now comes to us in such an easy, uncontroversial, and delightful manner, whether it be that of Chaucer or of Bridges, has always been "new poetry" when written. It has not appeared without alarming a majority of its readers, or offending those who were determined not to read it. Except to the fit audience which "present, past and future sees," each newcomer to the English Parnassus has been for a time a strange fowl, of a feather too haughty and a note too abrupt and dissonant. When the assurance of the most capable judges has begun to spread, and it is becoming commonly known that a Coleridge or a Swinburne has been (so to speak) elected a member of the genuine club, there has still been a pensive reluctance, a not altogether discommendable obstinacy. "A poet he may be; but Mr. Pope would not have rhymed or metred thus. I may not be intelligent enough—all *I* know is, the man's a Jacobin. Besides, I hear he is not sound on the Thirty-Nine Articles."

Poetry is more complicated than music, because from beginning to end it mixes pleasures and truths. You would have thought that while people's pleasures must be different, their truths might be the same. But truth itself, like pleasure, is something that we live by, and the truths that matter are the truths we incorporate in our lives. In the realm of truth, as in the realm of pleasure, a great distinction holds. There are the truths that are effective because they are generally seen and those that are ineffective because they are not generally seen. That a few rare spirits understand justice and tolerance is a subject for thankfulness, but still leaves those virtues in the cold; the question is how many understand them.

That the functions of poetry and criticism are admittedly different is no more relevant than is the difference of function between stars and love, relevant to Shakespeare's comparison of love with a star. But we are led on to a more serious error. We are told that "modern poetry becomes increasingly difficult to read." If so, the poorer poetry is! The best poetry has

always been easy to read—however hard, occasionally, to understand. Then why this difficulty? Because "we have to adjust our responses to the reception of very much more complex mental and emotional experiences"! And, secondly, because "we live in an age when new knowledge has altered the whole conception of the universe." But what has the universe got to do with it? Is Milton less sublime because his cosmology is ridiculous, or does Homer fail to be even more sublime than Milton, because his cosmology is, if possible, one degree more ridiculous?

The public for poetry is small, but even so, it contains a majority and a minority. The majority consists of those who delight in well-marked rhythm, unmistakable verbal melody, and an expression of acceptedly poetic emotions—usually connected with Nature. The minority is more exacting. It savours a poem as an old hand will savour his wine. What level of consciousness does that poem cause to vibrate? Does it sound in the depths of a man; does it wake in him something that is greater than any one person; does he feel, as he lets it run over the palate of his mind, the stirring of an emotion that has no geographical or historical confines, but is a link between him and all humanity? If it does, then the poet is a miracle-worker.

A poem does not merely translate the poet's condition of mind, for it is not until he has said it that he knows either what he wants to say or how he is going to say it. This qualified reassertion of the objectivity of beauty reacts persuasively against the modern tendency of defining art as an expression of the artist's personality. Nor is beauty itself a quality of things, but a value in virtue of its relation to the mind.

Beauty is always a matter of mystery; it is intuitively sensed But from Plato's time attempts have been made to give it rational explanation. The attempts, however unsuccessful their outcome, are justified on the ground that there must be something in our sure impressions of beauty that yields to analysis and compression within a formula.

Poetry is the quintessence of literature, and in the immense diversity of English Literature there is provision for every responsive human mind, whether simple or subtle, ignorant or learned.

A poem is a dream; or maybe a fact. Dante brings his imagination's loftiest flights to the test of everyday experience. His vision consists of a series and succession of experiences as far from anything the normal man encounters, or could encounter,

as the most outlandish of the prophecies of Blake. But his attitude to it is the reverse of Blake's. He presents it as a part of nature, he asserts and achieves the normality which Blake escapes and denies. If we withdrew from his poem all the conversations which turn on the fact that the poet has taken his body with him to Hell and Heaven, one of its chief topics would be gone.

The utterances of men as different as Keats, Coleridge, Shelley, Wordsworth, Blake, with the different language and different methods they employ, all tend in the same direction, and are found to explain what is most permanent, not only in the work of these men, but in their predecessors'. So when Shelley says that poets are the legislators of the world, or when Arnold says that poetry is a criticism of life, every one who is swimming in the current knows quite well what they mean; and to be professorial, to be worried, to look up criticism in the dictionary or ask your lawyer for an opinion, can only suggest that you are in a backwater.

It is never true of readers that "Love, like the intellect, grows bright gazing on many truths"; but whether it is that youthful seriousness is purer, and therefore answers more unerringly to that quality in literature, or that as we get older we read with more indifference, certainly the recognition of an author's seriousness is more immediate in the young. They will forgive an artist anything except a lack of it; the accommodation of his vision to the demands of an audience or of tradition they find it hard to forgive. Once persuaded that he is incapable of such compromises, his extravagances become merits in their eyes though with their elders they remain faults. And the reason much excellent criticism has no effect on the opinions of the young is, again, that it is not serious enough: its judgments are compromises, not personal intuitions; critics too often merely expound "case-made law." The young are not interested in that. They feel that taste should be the literary conscience of the soul; criticism the methodical application of it.

The answers to the question, "What is poetry?" have for the most part been answers to those other questions, "What is the *use* of poetry?" "What ought poetry to *do* for us?" For poetry *per se* is undefinable. What critics have at different periods expected of poetry has determined their definitions, and their estimation of different kinds of poetry has varied accordingly.

We can learn something about poetry simply by studying what people have thought about it at one period after another; without coming to the stultifying conclusion that there is nothing to be said but that opinion changes. The study of criticism, not as a sequence of random conjectures, but as a re-adaptation, may also help us to draw some conclusions as to what is permanent or eternal in poetry, and what is merely the expression of an age; and by discovering what does change, and how and why, we may become able to apprehend what does not change.

Mr. Eliot tells us that "pure," artistic appreciation is only an ideal (when not merely a figment), and must be, so long as the appreciation of art is an affair of limited and transient human beings existing in space and time. Both artist and audience are limited. There is for each time, for each artist, a kind of alloy required to make the metal workable into art; and each generation prefers its own alloy to any other. Hence each new master of criticism performs a useful service merely by the fact that his errors are of a different kind from the last; and the longer the sequence of critics we have, the greater amount of correction is possible.

Mr. Eliot also believes that there is an "eternal" poetry, separable from any alloy which made it appeal to contemporaries, and that criticism (progress by the elimination of errors) in time must help us to identify it.

Amongst all these varied demands on poetry there is always some permanent element in common, just as there are standards of good and bad writing independent of what any one of us happens to like or dislike. But every effort to formulate the common element is limited by the limitations of particular men in particular places and at particular times; and these limitations become manifest in the perspective of history.

Thus *Sunset*, by Mr. E. E. Cummings, is an attempt to work on our imaginations solely through staccato suggestions. Whether good or bad, I do not say, but Mr. Robert Graves admires it and I quote it merely as an example.

stinging
gold swarms
upon the spires
silver
chants the litanies the
great bells are ringing with rose
the lewd fat bells
and a tall

wind
is dragging
the
sea
with
dream
-s

By a curious paradox, "free verse" is, of all forms of verse, the least free, since the poet must be constantly creating his own rhythms, when unaided by a metrical scheme; and, as Patmore perceived long ago, irregular verse demands

"a strong though severe initiative of passion the wind of which is sufficient to raise in this metre the appropriate billows of harmony, each growing out of the other with manifest inevitableness, from the beginning to the end."

Moderns encourage poets to follow the associations of words apart from their meanings, and to trust that the result will be more coherent than they perhaps perceive themselves; others encourage the introduction of associations which are personal to the writer, and to follow which a complete knowledge of the author's external and internal life would be necessary.

The greatest poetry then, the poetry which most faithfully mirrors creative perfection, is of a temper that has reconciled the spontaneous and the enduring and attained wisdom in strength. For poetry both tests life and is tested by it. What authority attaches in the end to tumultuous aspiration, however musically expressed, and to all that passionate legislation which is the pitfall of inexperience? It holds us by the infection of a symbolical enthusiasm, for where there is so much ardour there must also be some vision, however nebulous and untried. It holds, it cannot convince us. But in the poet whom wisdom has ripened, aspiration has survived discernment. He confirms what we surmise with him of the possibilities of life by sharing with us his knowledge of its foundations. He sees the present and foresees the future. He has lived the good life and paid its price. His poetry is life itself, and flows from him with a sure promise.

Thus the reading of poetry involves the active cooperation of reader and writer, not only by the reader's temporarily subduing his own personality to that of the poet, in a "receptive relaxation," but, where some modern poets are concerned, of supplying the links in the chain of sequence and association which have been

designedly omitted by the author. Some training in the amplification and extension of his capacity for poetical experience is clearly necessary, if the reader is not to miss much of the pleasure that poetry can give; though one may hesitate to endorse the remark that "the chief conscious function of the interpreter of poetry is to waken the dead"! For the poetically dead nothing can be done; nor can even the potentialities of appreciation of the imaginatively comatose be indefinitely enlarged.

Poetry itself best teaches the love of poetry. No one can love poetry without a desire to discriminate, or without becoming interested, if not in abstract aesthetics, at least in the relation of poetry to life. These are the curiosities a poet aims at satisfying, and therefore he writes also for those who have already "discovered" poetry.

But what is the nature of poetry? Well, first, poetry is a particular stimulus which produces a certain kind of response in the right sort of reader. Nobody will dispute that. Secondly, the meaning of a poem to the mind can often also be conveyed in a bare statement; this much prose and poetry have in common. It is also clear that that is *all* they have in common. What is it that distinguishes the poet from the prose writer? The answer is that the poet's mode of experiencing the thought, or idea, or subject, or material is different; secondly, the words in which the experience is communicated are apt to be different, and also the order in which they are arranged. "The raw material of poetry is human experience . . . but the poet apprehends and interprets this general experience in ways which belong to him alone."

The life of a great poem depends on its continuing assertion of truth, as a tree that collects light and rises into it. The notion that poetry exists in the words in which it is uttered is false; it exists through them, it exists because of them, it exists because of the reality behind all words whose orders words obey.

There can be little doubt that poetry requires a certain freedom from common modes of stating facts or unfolding arguments. There is a rich and potent obscurity which readers of poetry have accepted and which they have preferred without foot notes.

It was said of old by poets in Ireland that the Irish harp had three strings. The first string sang to the world of youth, love, and the going to battle; the second string sang of sorrow and of death; the third string sang of forgetting and of sleep.

Into the deep well of our subconscious memory go all the impressions and reminiscences and facts which fall upon our minds and senses and emotions. And there in general they lie, a huddled sleeping company; or they come out straggling and inchoate, the mere tricks of disconnected association. But the poet, with the fire of his imagination, re-mints these scraps of memoried litter into a new-welded living form, pouring them into a fresh mould, and stamping them with the new bright impress of his own vitality. Poetry and life differ, just as coal and diamonds differ, though the basis of both is exactly the same substance. The poet remains a man as other men. The experience he uses as a starting point may be anything: a story, a mood, a moment, an incident, a character, a comment. It may be high or low, grave or gay, steady or fleeting. But whatever it is, it will begin by stirring within him that ferment of excitement . . . which we call inspiration. The sense of inspiration is incommunicable. That passion of "burning with mental bliss" as a modern poet has called it, cannot be transferred, any more than a love poem can communicate the passion of love. The communicable part of the experience, the part with which criticism can concern itself, is that which can be, and is, embodied in words. Hence it is fair to say that *Poetry is a special use of words.*

Some seven years ago, Mr. I. A. Richards, in a small book which he entitled *Science and Poetry*, noted the disappearance of belief in statements, which he admitted have always been "pivotal points in the organization of the mind, vital to its well being;" and, as a substitute for the functioning of these beliefs, he envisaged the possibility of a poetry "independent of all beliefs." At the end of his essay, Mr. Richards wrote with serious intonation: "We shall then be thrown back upon poetry. It is capable of saving us; it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos."

Mr. Richards' book, perhaps because of his thorough-going naivete in his new faith, precipitated a discussion in the critical journals which lasted some years. Various writers agreed with his diagnosis of serious intellectual maladies; nearly all of them were eager to accept his remedy.

Many definitions of poetry have been offered, and though some of them have elements in common, not one has been generally accepted. The most interesting have been made by poets. Here are a few: "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the

countenance of all science" (Wordsworth); "Poetry is the best words in the best order" (Coleridge); "Poetry is an endeavour to condense out of the flying vapours of the world an image of human perfection" (Yeats); "Poetry is articulate music" (Dryden); "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds" (Shelley).

Even from this handful, all well-known, it will be seen that none of them fulfils the purpose of a definition. Emily Dickinson said, "If I read a book . . . and I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry . . . is there any other way?" But that is only a test of the presence of poetry, not a definition of it.

Mr. Read, as a critic, is a stalwart defender of tradition; but he is also an artist, and as an artist he feels as strongly as many artists before him that every work requires, ideally, its own form, that idea and form are one, and that all this business, of which poetry mainly consists, this business of pouring words into prepared moulds, has more in it of convention and artifice than of art. He carries the criticism farther, takes it into the realm of psychology, and, analysing the creative process itself, suggests an interesting distinction between character and personality, a distinction which in many respects corresponds to the easier and more familiar distinction he has already set up between abstract and organic form. For this he takes as his text the remarkable letter in which Keats attempts to describe what he calls "negative capability," finding it pre-eminently in Shakespeare:—"When a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

Literature takes its coloring almost wholly from the writer's concept of man. But man has no stature, no dignity, no nobility and certainly no spirituality except through his relation to God. Unless conjoined with God, man is a monstrous creature, an unexplained presence, a freak of an organized and mechanized nature. Placed in his proper subordination to God, however, man ceases to be merely the higher animal and becomes a partaker of divinity. The first requisite, then, for a literature that has eternal and satisfying truth in it, that has undying beauty, that can inspire, is that literature which writes of men who acknowledge God as their creator, as the conserver through life, as the architect of the world in which they live, and as the end to which they must attain.

The power of love, which is the very core of life, is endowed

with a new meaning; and life, so far as this new meaning is not realised in it, is now divided, judged. That is an inescapable fact; and poetry lives on fact, cannot any longer live in the world, cannot possess wholeness and sanity and health, except with open eyes, recognising the fact, assimilating it. You cannot be sane and whole in a Christian world unless you are a Christian; you cannot pretend you are not judged, when you are. Christianity has many facets; so let me insist that the vital thing in it for art is not its judgment, but its vision. The judgment arises out of the vision, and the vision embraces, what the judgment often seems to soil, the love of human passion. "With my body I thee worship." That single sentence relegates the whole Greek world and dictates to Christian poetry a new standard, new conditions, of what is sane and whole.

In an essay entitled *The Frontiers of Poetry*, Jacques Maritain offers the advice: "Only in the light of theology can contemporary art completely acquire self-knowledge and recover from the false systems of metaphysics which obsess it." And with curious propriety, his next two sentences might have been addressed, the first to Mr. Richards and those inclined to take his suggestion seriously, the second to the unhappy literary converts to Communism.

He says: "By showing us where moral truth and the genuine supernatural are situate, religion saves poetry from the absurdity of believing itself destined to transform ethics and life: saves it from overweening arrogance. But by teaching man to discern immaterial realities and the savor of the spirit, by linking poetry and art itself to God, it protects them against cowardice and self-abandonment, allows them to attain a more exalted and more rigorous idea of their essential spirituality, and to concentrate their inventive activity on the fine point thereof."

We must not be tempted to discuss the relative merits of poetry and showmanship, and the chances of a writer having both. The important point is that poetry should wish to justify itself by being desired; it should be entertaining and popular, it should have "some direct social utility." But the dangerous implications of "social utility" are instantly quashed. That does not mean that the poet "should meddle with the tasks of the theologian, the preacher, the economist, the sociologist or anybody else; that he should do anything but write poetry, poetry not defined in terms of something else." Of course the poet should

not meddle with the tasks of the theologian or sociologist; but the poet—and the critic, too—possesses religious belief or unbelief and sociological interests that will determine if not the nature of his poetry, at least its functioning in society; and it is there that confusion arises.

The chief use of the "meaning" of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be (for here again I am speaking of some kinds of poetry and not all) to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him.

Mr. Eliot says on this point: "Some of the poetry to which I am most devoted is poetry which I did not understand at first reading; some is poetry which I am not sure I understand yet: for instance, Shakespeare's. And finally, there is the difficulty caused by the author's having left out something which the reader is used to finding; so that the reader, bewildered, gropes about for what is absent, and puzzles his head for a kind of 'meaning' which is not there, and is not meant to be there."

This is only too true, and it is often impossible to know when one ought to look for a meaning, and when it is vain to do so.

There are two types of poet: the one chiefly concerned to communicate as exactly as he can a certain definite, clearly realized experience, and the other, for whom poetry is more "making" than the communication of predetermined ideas, the weaving (in Keats's phrase) of a tapestry empyrean, in the course of which the poet is willing "to accept from the whirl of suggestions passing through his brain, those which seem to his exquisite sense the most beautiful." Wordsworth represents the first type and Keats the second, Shakespeare standing in this respect half-way between the two, "quicker than Wordsworth to respond, and controlled by a firmer purpose than Keats." As displayed in their manuscript corrections, there is little difficulty in proving that Keats was far more open to impressions from the medium than Wordsworth, whose revision is most often directed towards securing a more scrupulous faithfulness to the original impression.

Professor Housman takes a position which is the extreme romantic one, in the tradition of Coleridge and De Quincey, that one cannot define poetry, but one can (if one has the proper sense, which is a rare one) know it when one sees it; and he declares further that whatever poetry is, it is entirely non-intellectual, and has nothing to do with the meaning of what it says. To illustrate his first point he gives examples of verse which is poetry, and verse which is not; and to support the

second, he cites the same verse of the forty-ninth psalm as it appears in the Prayer Book and in the Bible, giving his testimony that the former, *But no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him,*" is to me poetry so moving that I can hardly keep my voice steady in reading it," while the latter, *None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him,* I can read without emotion." And he adds a few tests by which he himself knows that he is in the presence of poetry: "I can no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat, but I think we both recognise the object by the symptoms which it provokes in us."

This, like all good romantic criticism, is exciting; but it is hard to make it useful.

Is the work of art beautiful because it fits one or another mathematical scheme, or is the scheme beautiful because it fits the work of art? The answer lies in the fact that, with the possible exception of certain ancient decorative devices and pieces of pottery, the work of art has always arrived on the scene in advance of the theorist. The music composers of any period erect by common effort an apparatus of harmony that comes to be generally accepted as beautiful. Then on their trail enter the theorists, who supply the wisdom after the event. An art that builds itself on its own preconceived theories, like much modern art, is sterile. In order to square theory with fact the theorist may have to resort to arbitrary assumptions.

This is not to say that scientific analysis of the arts is useless. Indeed, rationalizing the intuitions of genius is helpful, especially for people whose taste for the details of beautiful expression needs over-sight. Modern art puts so much stress on personality and freshness and on vigor without balance that it needs the restraining touch of the formalist.

Much of the poetry we value has been the product of those who made free with the work of their predecessors. All folk-poetry, all bardic poetry (Homer for instance), is the result of the passage of ideas and phrases through generations of minds. The copyright law which prevents a writer rehandling the work of another, and the modern dread of the charge of plagiarism, tend to interrupt the flow of imaginative vitality. Thus today Shakespeare would be forbidden to write *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, because he incorporated essentials of an extant play, that is some-

one else's property. Molière, too, took what he wanted wherever he found it.

"Nothing is more new-fangled than the obligation to be entirely original," says M. Valéry; and Mr. Sturge Moore, both by example and precept, would encourage poets "who find a poem lying like a swallow with a broken wing on the threshold of Fame," to set the fragile little bones and lure it to fly once more.

If ever there was an objective, external poet, it was Milton. He did not appeal to the Spirit to justify in his poem the ways of his poem's god; that would not have got him an inch farther. His prayer was that his poem might be a vehicle through which a revealed Jehovah might be made intelligible and acceptable to mankind, his worshippers. He failed, of course; but only in that attempt could he have done what he did. And so of the "things invisible." He ought perhaps to have been thinking only of the mind; if he had been, he would have written another poem. He was thinking of the transcendent glories, of the Heaven of Heavens: into those glories he intends by prayer and by imagination to penetrate further and deeper than any human mind penetrated before.

Until somebody discovers a means of reducing the human mind to the condition of a thermometer, automatically registering artistic merit alone, the criticisms of the authoritative critics are bound to be coloured by more or less irrelevant considerations. This, perhaps, is only to say that critics are critics; that is, rightly or wrongly they consider other things beside artistic merit.

No doubt it is because so much of Dante's world comes to him ready-made that he is able to remake it with all this splendour and assurance. None the less, the final reflection for us, however he did it, is that it is done. Here stands, and will stand as long as eyes can see, this monument, this vision. Seeing it, man can never consent to be less than he is there. The terms may change; the truth endures. We can feel that we are greater than we know. We cannot, by any trick of substitution, know ourselves greater than we are. Our modern tendency is towards a destructive self-knowledge. Our poets themselves have begun to insist on the isolation of the drop of consciousness on each man's inner solitude, and on each moment's solitude in a hap-hazard stream we call experience. It is as if we thought to achieve a sense of pure reality in a pursuit of disconnectedness. Such a pursuit is a child's error. The actual moment can never seize itself; it is what it is by virtue of all that has preceded it, all that is involved

in it; the present is the accumulation of the past. The miracle in Dante is the combination of the vital moment and the fatal entry, each item written down, incorporated, as page by page the book of life is filled. The meanings grow; the mind is purified; experience gathers mass and momentum; crypt, nave, and vaulting stand solid, sensitive and true; till, at last, among many spires, the loftiest rises to its exactly calculated height, and is crowned with the prepared stone which completes the edifice. It is the world's greatest feat of endurance, of comprehensiveness, the most convincing example known to us of moral beauty.

Someone was remarking that of recent years few poems had been published which had had the good fortune to be immediately considered certainties in achievement; and, further, that latterly scarcely any new names had been added here to the list of those from whom distinct and important poetical utterance is to be expected.

The answer may be that, passing from mere *poseurs* to serious writers, we find that their frequent obscurity may be referred to five main causes: (I) over-compression of language—in which may often be traced an undiscriminating imitation of Donne and Hopkins; (II) the use of a "personal" language peculiar to the poet, an "emotional shorthand," conveying a private cluster of emotional associations, inaccessible to the reader; (III) preoccupation with transient, fleeting impressions and moods, consequent on a conception of life as a succession of isolated moments; (IV) the flood of new knowledge of the nature and behaviour of man and the universe, the vocabulary of which has, as yet, no emotional associations; and (V) a deliberate ignoring of logical association of emotional experience, resulting in an unrelated sequence of discrete images or statements, in order to simulate more closely the "texture of life." From which we conclude that "the poets of distinction to-day are those whose experience is so specialized that it can only be communicated to a small, highly educated minority of their fellow-men." Not until the new knowledge has been assimilated into the general race-consciousness, and a new language of symbol and image evolved—a language embodying the new intellectual values, but one to which the old emotional responses can be attuned—will the interrupted continuity of poetry, as the delight of the many as well as of the sophisticated few, be restored.

Most things in life are easier than they used to be; it therefore escapes our notice that life itself and art, the mirror of life,

are not among these easier things. Both are becoming continually more difficult. Obviously the more we know, the more difficult it must be to be adequate to our knowledge. By grasping the easy parts of it, the inventions and the gadgets, and letting the rest go in vague regret, we have turned the world into a dust-bin; and how, in our dust-bin, shall we grow to our full stature and be men and poets?

It is probably always the case that critics are more occupied with the theory of verse than with poetry itself. The art is so precious, so cherished by all who adhere to it, that all its lovers are for ever pulling up the roots and wondering that flowers do not grow head downwards in the earth. Meanwhile, a few poets in sequestered corners continue to put out blossoms sunwards, unconscious of their duty to illustrate the movement of the times or to reflect contemporary doctrine. And these are the poets with whom posterity is concerned.

But the impatience of poets who are endeavouring to set the Thames on fire for themselves, though highly exhilarating, is not a model for the literary historian.

"Sidney's assumption," Mr. Eliot says, "is that poetry gives at once delight and instruction, and is an adornment of social life and an honour to the nation." Such assumptions, he maintains, "for a long time . . . were never questioned or modified," and "during that time great poetry was written, and some criticism which just because of its assumptions has permanent instruction to give." Though Shakespeare's passage on imagination claims more for poetry than this, no doubt this generalization may be accepted as roughly true.

"The essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal; it is to be able to see beneath both the beauty and the ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror, and the glory."

That particular sentence occurs, almost as an aside, in correcting a comment of Matthew Arnold's. In the full comprehension of that sentence lies one clue to a large part of, if not all, poetry.

UNFAMILIAR QUOTATIONS

From infancy to youth boys run away from girls; from youth to marriage girls run away from boys; after marriage they run away from each other.—*F. J. Stimson.*

Youth is a blunder; manhood a struggle; old age a regret.—*Disraeli.*

Like most logical reasoners, he forgot that humanity might be illogical, and inconsistent, without being insincere.—*Bret Harte.*

KOMATEEKAY

A ONE-ACT FOLK PLAY*

By Alice Carter Cook

Characters

Old Man Spider, *a little, shrivelled up old man.*
His Wife
Stingy-Woman, *a fat, supercilious person, with a black baby (doll) swathed on her back*
Her Daughter
Picaninnies of Various Sizes

Time: *Way back yonder in the days of he-who-can-get-may-eat.*

Place: *Clearing in a primeval forest of Liberia.*

Note: By the alternate removal and replacement of the mortar during the momentary fall of the curtain between scenes, the scene becomes respectively the clearing of the Spider Family or of Stingy Woman.

Spider Wife and Stingy Woman wear wigs of natural brown wool sewed firmly to coarse hair nets. Spider wears a close fitting, dark brown, cloth cap on which the wool is sewed loosely. When he is shaved his wife has a razor blade concealed under the bone razor. As she cuts the threads the wool falls off, leaving the brown cap exposed to be whitened with heavy powder or French chalk.

If African costumes cannot be obtained from a Museum, all the actors may wear pieces of striped cotton cloth (bed ticking will do) with a hole cut in the center large enough for the head to go through, and long enough to reach to the knees. Arms and legs are stained and bare, the feet moccasined. Stingy Woman, in view of her affluence, wears strings of bright beads on arms and around neck and very large ear rings (wooden curtain rings, in the play as produced.)

The children are five little negroes, five to seven years old. The mixture in the bowl from which the baby and the child eat, is real rice pudding which the children eat with avidity.

*Based on the original legends gathered by the author in Liberia.

The wheelbarrow is an anachronism, but it was found impracticable to manipulate the woven basket in which burdens are carried on the back in Liberia.

Tom-tom beats, softly at first, with increasing volume. Chorus (behind scene) sings *Nobody knows the trouble I see*

Nobody knows the trouble I see—
Da-se-ge-ma-rum-ba.
Nobody knows the trouble I see—
De-se-ge-ma-rum-ba.
Been goin' up, been goin' down—
Da-se-ge—
No li'lest grain of rice I foun'—
Da-se-ge—
Oh! nobody knows the trouble I see—
Da-de-ge-ma-rum-ba
Nobody knows the trouble I see—
Da-se-ge-ma-rum-ba.

Curtain rises on clearing of STINGY WOMAN. *Thatched hut in center background. Coarse bags hang on mat walls. Low wooden stools on each side of center door. Mats scattered on ground. Wooden mortar with pestle six feet long, left stage. Fire of logs burns (electric bulb beneath) front center. Two pots on fire, others standing near. Large wooden spoons in two of the pots.*

SPIDER WIFE (*behind stage takes up refrain of the Chorus*) Da-se-ge—ma-rum-ba—da-se-—ge-ma-rum—ba—marumba—

(STINGY WOMAN *enters from hut; takes bag from the wall; pours grain from it into the mortar and begins to pound with pestle, but so softly as not to obscure dialogue.*

SPIDER WIFE *enters with dragging steps as she finishes her song and approaches* STINGY WOMAN *hesitatingly.*)

SPIDER WIFE. Howdy!

STINGY WOMAN. Howdy!

SPIDER WIFE. Kin I pick li'l rice?

STINGY WOMAN. Sho' yo' kin pick him.

(SPIDER WIFE *takes empty bag from wall and goes out.* STINGY WOMAN (*pounding grain, sings.*)

So cold first of the dry, new rice.
O my, O my, O my, O my!
Oh, so cold but so sweet of the hard new rice.
O my, O my, O my, O my!

(SPIDER-WIFE *enters with bag bulging with rice.*)

SPIDER-WIFE. I done pick plenty rice now, ma'am. Please ma'am, kin I take li'l rice home fo' my chillens?

STINGY-WOMAN (*jovially*). Sho' yo' kin take him—sho' yo' kin, Spider-Wife, jes' soon yo' tell the name that rice. Yo' got to count the name all them different kind rice yo' know them, an' when yo' count the right name yo' goin' get so much rice yo' kin carry him fo' yo' chillens.

SPIDER-WIFE (*eagerly*). Is he zo-bo, ma?

STINGY-WOMAN (*scornfully*). 'Deed he aint no triflin' zo-bo rice. Set down, ma. Set down an' think him. Mo' likely yo' think him mo' better settin' so. Set down an' think him.

SPIDER-WIFE (*gingerly sitting on a wooden stool*). Be he quijaw, ma?

STINGY-WOMAN (*snickering*). No, ma, he aint no quijaw. I won't never hev none that sticky quijaw rice. It aint good fo' my chillens 'tall, sticky so.

SPIDER-WIFE (*hesitatingly*). Golah jaw, ma?

STINGY-WOMAN (*ironically*). Aint yo' got no sense 'tall? Golah-jaw won't never grow in these parts—aint never see no Golah-jaw in these parts.

SPIDER-WIFE (*after long thought*). Pinie?

STINGY-WOMAN. Pinie? Pinie, is it yo' sayin'? I aint never heard tell of no pinie. Pinie? No, it aint pinie whatsomever you call pinie.

SPIDER-WOMAN (*desperately*). It aint bodie now, ma?

STINGY-WOMAN (*shrugging*). 'Course it aint bodie. We done growed bodie one time. Aint growed none this long time now. Aint like it.

SPIDER-WOMAN (*timidly*). Yo' sho' it don't be bodie, ma?

STINGY-WOMAN. How it be yo' goin' think I don' know the name the rice grow on my own farm? Yo' can't never tell the name. Yo' better go on home back to yo' chillens.

SPIDER-WIFE. My po' chillens! Starvin', dyin' fo' hongry! Can't you give me li'llest scrap rice fo' my chillens, ma?

STINGY-WOMAN. Sho' I kin give it! Aint I tol' yo' I give yo' even so much rice yo' kin carry him if yo' call the name right.

SPIDER-WIFE (*wheedling*). Jes' li'l handful rice fo' the li'llest one—please, ma—jes' one li'l handful—

STINGY-WOMAN (*angrily*). Yo' go 'long back where yo' come from it. I aint goin' be pestered no more 'long of yo.' If so be I give yo' rice when you don' tell the name, I goin' be

pestered with all the low down trash 'roun here. Yo' got to tell the name. That the law. All yo' got to do is think the right name, an' tell him—but *yo'* ain't *never* goin' think him! (*She laughs loud and long.*) I tell yo' *Yo'* ain't *never* goin' think him, an yo' ain't *never* goin' tell him! Ain't NOBODY—no-o-o-o o— Soul—know the name this rice.

SPIDER-WIFE (*tearfully*). I don tol' all the name I know, ma. I better be goin' 'long. Yo sho' can't give me one li'l handful rice fo' my li'l baby chile—po' li'l baby chile—cryin' all the night fo' hongry?

STINGY-WOMAN (*turning her back, gives a vicious whack with her pestle, as she speaks*). I got chillens. Plenty hongry. Yo' go' long back to yo' chillens. I aint can be pestered with all the trash 'roun'. Yo' kin come back tomorrer 'gen, count the name other rice tomorrer ef so be yo' chillens hongry.

(SPIDER-WIFE *sorrowfully goes out dropping her bag at* STINGY-WOMAN'S *feet.*)

CURTAIN

TOM-TOM

Curtain rises on SPIDER *clearing, the mortar having been removed.* SPIDER *sits on a stool, his head in his hands, before the hut. Picaninnies lie on the ground or squat near him, their heads in their hands, their eyes fixed fearfully on* SPIDER.

SPIDER WIFE *comes slowly around the hut.* SPIDER *sits motionless.*

The children do not see her at first but, when they do, rush to her.

CHILDREN. Where the rice, mummy? Aint yo' got no rice mummy? (SPIDER-WIFE *shakes her head mournfully. The children begin to whimper.* SPIDER *rises and comes slowly towards his wife.*)

SPIDER. Yo' aint bring no rice? (WIFE *shakes her head.*)

SPIDER. She aint give yo' not one one li'l grain?

SPIDER-WIFE. Not one li'l speck—not one li'l grain. I done tol' her my baby cryin' fo' hongry. She aint got no feelin'. She aint got no heart.

SPIDER. She aint got no livin' bref of soul. She aint no human woman. (*The children cry louder.*)

SPIDER. Hush yo' screechin', yo' triflin' chillen. Hush up, I tol' yo'. I aint goin' stan' it no mo'. Yo' go 'long 'way from

here with yo' yellin an' hollerin'. I done got 'nuf all the day. Go 'long from here, I tellin' yo'. I aint goin' stan' no mo'. (WIFE, *with frightened glances at* SPIDER, *hustles the children out of sight.* SPIDER *sits down on his stool again, his head in his hands.* WIFE *comes back but he pays no attention to her. She sits on another stool, looking fearfully at him.*)

SPIDER (*after long silence.*) Don't yo' go to say nothin', woman. I goin' up an' study up a scheme. (*Brief silence. Lights dim gradually.*)

SPIDER WIFE (*sings softly.*) Po' li'l chillen
Dyin', starvin' fo' hongry.

SPIDER. Hush yo' noise, Woman. I goin' up to study up a scheme. (*Silence. Lights dim more.*)

SPIDER. Well, we hev to go tomorrer 'gen try.

(*Darkness becomes complete.* SPIDER *and* WIFE *sleep.*)

VOICE (*sings behind stage to the tune of "Deep River."*)

Po' li'l chillen,
Po' li'l starvin' chillen,
Po' li'l chillen,
A-starvin', a-dyin' fo' hongry.
Voices callin',
Li'l chillen voices cryin',
Li'l chillen a-starvin', dyin' fo' hongry.
L'l chillen, is yo' starvin'?
L'l chillen, is yo' dyin'?
Is yo' starvin' an dyin' fo' hongry?
Oh po' li'l chillen,
Li'l chillen starvin' an' dyin'—

(*Tom-Tom beats softly. Light dawns gradually.* SPIDER *wakes.*)

SPIDER. Wake up, woman! Wake up, yo' there, sleepin' there! It's tomorrer! Yo' an' I hev to go 'gain try.

SPIDER-WIFE (*opening her eyes, looks about her dazed.*) You done ax me, Spider?

SPIDER. I done tol' yo' tomorrer's came. Wake up! Bring razor! Shave my head! (*Wife gets razor of thin bone.*)

SPIDER. Shave all my head jes' clean ez yo' kin. Shave every hair I got on. Shave it jes' tender ez yo' kin. (WIFE *shaves him carefully.*)

SPIDER. Bring water. Let me wash myself. (WIFE *brings water in clay bowl.* SPIDER *washes vigorously and looks at his own image in the water with glee.*)

SPIDER. Bring some white chalk. (WIFE *does so.*)

SPIDER. White it all over my head carefully. (*Wife does so.*)

SPIDER. Well, now, let's go. Let's go now soon in the mornin' befo' the chillens wake up an' begin cryin' mo' 'gen. I aint can stan' to hear them li'l chillens cryin' no mo'. Had 'nuf. We go.

SPIDER-WIFE. Where we is goin'?

SPIDER. Yo' got to tote me where we goin'. Yo' got to tote me on the barrer'.

(WIFE *brings wheelbarrow.* SPIDER *climbs upon it and she tucks him in with cloths and wheels him off stage, his whitened head lolling over the edge of the barrow.*)

CURTAIN

TOM-TOM

(*Curtain rises on* STINGY WOMAN *clearing.* STINGY WOMAN *sits on stool with a bag by her. She takes grain from the bag, pours it upon a large, woven plaque and blows the chaff from it. Enter* SPIDER WIFE.)

SPIDER-WIFE. Howdy, ma'am!

STINGY-WOMAN. Howdy!

SPIDER-WIFE. I don come back 'gen one mo' time. Bring my li'l baby ef so be it can lay while I pickin' rice.

STINGY-WOMAN. Oh, yes, it can lay. (*She glances casually at the barrow and goes on with her song and her work.* SPIDER-WIFE *sets the barrow down. Goes out to pick rice. Voice behind stage sings negro spiritual,* "Go Down, Death." *Baby begins to cry.*)

STINGY-WOMAN. Come to yo' baby. It cryin' now. Come fix yo' baby now. (SPIDER-WIFE *comes and bends over the baby, trying vainly to quiet him.*)

SPIDER-WIFE. It cryin' for hongry, ma. Please, ma, kin I cook li'l rice fo' my hongry baby?

STINGY-WOMAN. Oh, yes, yo' kin cook him. Yo' kin cook even so much yo' baby kin eat him. We 'low that, so long yo' don't take none 'way. (SPIDER-WIFE *puts rice over the fire that burns in the center of the clearing; cooks it and feeds the baby, crooning to him the while; tucks him up in the country cloth and he seems to sleep.*)

SPIDER-WIFE. Thank yo', ma. My baby sleep good now all full that good rice.

STINGY-WOMAN. Yes, it sleep good now so. Tain't no harm givin' baby rice when yo' pickin' rice, but yo' can't take none 'way without yo' tell the name. That the law. (SPIDER-WIFE *returns to rice picking. Enter* GIRL.)

GIRL (*to* STINGY-WOMAN.) Gimme rice, ma. I hongry.

STINGY-WOMAN. All right. Help yo' self. Yo' kin cook him. (THE GIRL *puts rice on the fire; takes it off after a few minutes and begins to eat.*)

STINGY-WOMAN. Look here, chile! Ef yo' don't put plenty water in that rice, he goin' give yo' pain in the stomach ef yo' eat him so. Yo' better put plenty water in that hard *Komateekay.* (*The* WOMAN *and* GIRL *do not notice the* SPIDER-BABY *who pokes his head over the edge of the barrow, winks at the sky and begins to cry lustily.*)

STINGY-WOMAN (*calling to* SPIDER-WIFE). Come, you! Come on to yo' baby. It cryin' some mo' 'gen now. (THE MOTHER *comes and tries to quiet the* BABY, *but he will not eat and the more she tries to soothe him the harder he cries.*)

STINGY-WOMAN. Yo' chile aint feel so good. Better take it on home. We aint like hear chillen yellin' an' screechin' so. Tote it 'long back.

SPIDER-WIFE. It done et plenty that good rice. It done hurtin' now. The stomach aint feel so good. I goin' now. Can't yo' give me li'l rice fo' my chillens back home?

STINGY-WOMAN. Yo' can't hev none till you count the name. (*While the* BABY *yells and the* STINGY-WOMAN *shakes her head emphatically at each new name,* SPIDER-WOMAN *goes through her list.*)

SPIDER-WIFE. Golah-jaw—pinie—zo-bo—bodie—etc. (*finally discouraged*) I got to go home anyway. I can't find the name that rice when my baby hollorin' so. I got to go on home. Can't do nothin' for it. (*She wheels the barrow off stage.*)

CURTAIN

TOM-TOM

(*Curtain rises on* SPIDER *clearing.* THE CHILDREN *run out to greet* SPIDER *who jumps briskly to the ground, begins to dance frantically.* MOTHER *and* CHILDREN *watch him in astonishment.*)

SPIDER. Oh, my ole woman! Oh, my li'l chillens! I done foun' the name!

WIFE. You done foun' the name!

SPIDER. Yes ma'am! I done foun' him! O me! O me! That stingy woman she think there aint nobody 'roun' can't hear what she sayin'. Nobody 'roun but that Spider-Woman baby—think it can't hear nothin'.

SPIDER-WIFE. An yo' done hear the name!

SPIDER. Sartain, I done hear him! She think nobody can't hear, an' she cry out, say unto that girl, "Yo' must put plenty water on that hard Komateekay—Komateekay—that the name. Yo' goin' learn that name now when I say it unto you—Komateekay—What the name?

WIFE. Komateekay—

SPIDER. Say him some more 'gen—Komateekay.

WIFE. Komateekay—Komateekay—

SPIDER. That good. Yo' remember him right well now. Listen unto me, all yo' li'l chillen—What the name that rice?

CHILDREN (*in unison.*) Komateekay!

SPIDER. That very good now. Now, chillen, tell it once more 'gen—tell it good—what the name?

CHILDREN (*shouting*). Komateekay!

SPIDER. That very good. Tomorrer we goin' hev plenty rice ef yo' don't forget the name. Hongry time goin' lef' tomorrer.

CHILDREN. Wow! Wow! Wow!

SPIDER. Go 'long to sleep now, chillens. Hev plenty sleep. We goin' rise soon in the mornin' go get good, some, nice, plenty rice—what the name that rice?

CHILDREN. Komateekay!

SPIDER. Very good. Go 'long to yo' sleep.

(CHILDREN *tumble to the ground and sleep immediately.* SPIDER *drops on one mat, his wife on another. They, too, sleep. After a time* SPIDER *wakes.*)

SPIDER. Woman! You, there, sleepin' there!

WIFE (*sleepily.*) Yas'r.

SPIDER. What the name that rice?

WIFE. Komateekay! (*They sleep again.* SPIDER *wakes.*)

SPIDER. Wake up woman! Wake up! What the name that rice?

WIFE. Komateekay.

SPIDER. You done remember right good now. Get up now. Wake the chillen now. Come on, you li'l chillen. Come on! We got to go now. Come on, all yo'! We goin' now get that rice. What the name that rice?

CHILDREN. Komateekay.

SPIDER. So now we go 'long 'gen. Fix me up 'gen, woman. I goin' be Spider baby 'gen so. Can't lef' the baby behime. (*Laughing.*) Stingy-Woman might think the baby tol' the ole lady.

WIFE. I kinder 'feard.

SPIDER. No cause to be 'feard, woman. You tote me like yo' done an' the chillen kin come 'long slow behime. That Stingy Woman aint know they be Spider Chillen. Yo' goin' see that Stingy-Woman run plenty fast now—yo' all is.

Come on, now. We go. Yo' li'l chillen, yo' wander 'long behime—come one, come 'nother—so—An' don't say NOTHIN' till I ax yo'. (SPIDER-WIFE *leads the way with the* BABY *in the barrow, the procession following off stage.*)

CURTAIN

TOM-TOM

(*Curtain rises on* STINGY-WOMAN *sitting on a stool, crooning a song.* SPIDER-WIFE *enters with barrow.* THE CHILDREN *come in one by one and crouch in a row by the edge of the clearing.*)

SPIDER-WIFE. My baby hongry 'gen now. I come pick mo' rice.

STINGY-WOMAN. That very good. It can lay. Yo' go 'long pick rice. (SPIDER-WIFE *goes to pick rice.* CHILDREN *sit around solemnly.* STINGY-WOMAN *sings softly.*)

I got a rice
I got a rice
All of my chillen got a rice
Everybody talkin' 'bout
Rice aint eatin' him
Goin' eat my sweet, hard rice—
Rice! Rice! Rice!
Goin' eat my hard, sweet Rice!

(SPIDER-WIFE *returns.*)

SPIDER-WIFE. I goin' now, ma'am. Can yo' give me li'l rice for my chillens?

STINGY-WOMAN. Yo' must call the name.

SPIDER-WIFE (*intoning while* THE CHILDREN *sway back and forth.*) Pinie—bodie—zo-bo—golah-jaw. (SPIDER-BABY *gets restless, thinking she has forgotten the name. He wriggles and*

twists and cries to call her attention, but she goes on while STINGY-WOMAN *and* THE CHILDREN *divide their attention between the list of resounding names and the frantic baby.*)

SPIDER-WIFE. Quijaw — bodie — kamajor — pineo—buije ormanikor — zo-bo—borgui—karrizo—bozojaw — quijebo —boquizo—jawzobo—kibebo—diebo—kuibozo—(*She stops, gasping, sits down, thinks hard, and suddenly jumps up, shouting into* STINGY-WOMAN's *face.*) Komateekay!

STINGY-WOMAN. What?

SPIDER-WIFE. *Komateekay!* (SPIDER *jumps from the ground and signals to the children, who spring forward shouting, "Komateekay!"* STINGY-WOMAN *stands a moment petrified, then begins to gather up all her belongings—mats, brass pots, cloths, everything she has.* SPIDER CHILDREN *roll on the ground, yelling Komateekay! Komateekay!* STINGY WOMAN, *putting her hands to her ears, drops everything she has collected and runs as fast as her fat legs can carry her, pursued by the shouts of the united Spider family: Komateekay! Komateekay! Komateekay! The* CHORUS *sings triumphantly to the tune of "I Got a Shoes":*

I got a rice,
I got a rice;
All of my chillen got a rice
Goin' home a-shoutin for to eat that good rice,
Goin' to eat Komateekay.
Rice
Rice
Rice
Everybody talkin' 'bout rice aint eatin' him.
Rice
Rice
We goin' eat Komateekay—
Koma—tee—kay!!!!!

CURTAIN

SIDNEY LANIER

POET OF THE SOUTH

By N. Bryllion Fagin

At its best, Southern literature—if we eliminate Poe—has produced no poet of very considerable magnitude. For a long time it continued to be either excessively sectional or excessively English. Either it prided itself on its local traditions and its local aristocracy and greatness, ignoring the world without as of minor importance, or it slavishly imitated the major and minor Elizabethans, Augustans, and Victorians. Poe was an original poet, but was, in fact, so original that he can be classed neither as a Southern nor, for that matter, as an American poet. His temperament, his subject matter, his style—were largely his own. The South is but little reflected in the poetry of Poe.

In Sidney Lanier the South has produced a poet at once distinctly Southern in theme and form and more than Southern in appeal. The South, its physical, political, social, and intellectual atmosphere, permeates the poems of Lanier, but the personality of Lanier, his fine sense of rhythm, his independence of imagination and thought impart to them a more universal value. With Lanier poetry was a personal medium of expression, a delicate instrument, like his magic flute, for the transmission of elusive emotions and, alas, more positive convictions. The Southern tradition of making pretty songs and of projecting a moral purpose is discernible in Lanier, too, but his poems are often greater than their prettiness and their moral purpose.

It can truly be said that, with slight exception, Southern poetry up to Lanier was something in the nature of a gentlemanly or ladylike exercise. The making of pretty rhymes in the accepted patterns of English verse was a laudatory accomplishment. That poetry has its birth in poignant personal, national, and universal experience was a theory foreign to the general run of Southern poets. In attempting to compose poetry, the poet shook off the dust of reality, mounted Pegasus, and ascended into the white clouds of figure and foot.

Sidney Lanier, too, rode Pegasus, but somehow he never lost himself entirely in the enticing clouds. His feet are not always clear of the native soil that gave him birth and inspiration. The themes that vexed his homeland and his time cry out of his

lines. A distinct personality, reacting to ordinary problems, sensitive to pain and pleasure, ridden by instincts and passions, and subject to flights of fancy, reflects itself in his somewhat over-ornate poetry. Corn and cotton, trade and commerce, banks and bankers, toil and poverty, love and religion, fear and exultation and ecstasy—these guide the pulse of his somewhat too delicate measures.

There were influences in Lanier's poetry. Something reminiscent of Tennyson is there, and something reminiscent of Swinburne. There is moral and religious nostalgia; there are lines such as

> And I would I could know what swimmeth below when the tide comes in

or

> Blow, herald, blow! . . .

or

> If life were caught by a clarionet,
> And a wild heart, throbbing in the reed,

recalling the lines

> And I would that my tongue could utter
> The thoughts that arise in me.
>
> Blow, bugle, blow! . . .
>
> If love were what the rose is,
> And I were like the leaf, . . .

There are metrical experiments: long flowing lines, assonance and alliteration, versatile rhyming. Yet the poems have characteristics of their own; they are lighter and more fluent than Tennyson's. They are less purple and wan and autumnal than Swinburne's. There is a Shelley-like quality in them, a sky-lark note, a trance-like imagism.

Sidney Lanier was essentially a realist. Unlike most of his predecessors and even successors in Southern poetry, he did not often attempt to create poetry out of nothing. There is substance in his songs and hymns. There is a real world, as we know it, behind his cadences. Lanier thought;—as an individual, as a Southerner, as an American, as a man of the world. He thought about the South, about war and reconstruction, about this vast Western continent, about Nature, and he thought—unfortunately too much—about music and poetry, and literature.

The period of reconstruction brought numerous problems to

the South. Industrialism made its appearance in ruined cities and towns; trade and commerce began to invade a sluggish land; politics played its murky role. Life and serenity became cheap; greed came into its heyday. Lanier the artist Lanier the poet, the bookman, contemplator, and musician, found no place for himself in the changed South. He protested against its new spirit, and continued to protest— to the end of his brief life— against an industrialized world in which the artist has no place except as a trafficker of a non-essential commodity.

His poems abound in bitter lines, in outcries against the malignity and the spirit of despoliation of modern commercialism. In *Sunrise*, written almost before his very death, his ecstasy at the radiance of the new sun is turned to bitterness by the thought that with this radiance

> Old Want is awake and agog, every wrinkle a-frown;
> The worker must pass to his work in the terrible town:

He is thankful, however, that he has seen the sun rise, for now

> Oh, never the mast-high run of the seas
> Of traffic shall hide thee,
> Never the hell-colored smoke of the factories
> Hide thee, . . .

He has seen the sun and he fears not.

> . . . nay, and I fear not the thing to be done;
> I am strong with the strength of my lord the Sun:
> How dark, how dark soever the race that must needs be run,
> I am lit with the Sun.

In *Individuality* he calls upon his Cousin Cloud to strike

> Some maggot politician throng
> Swarming to parcel out
> The body of a land, . . .

In *Clover* he wonders ironically at the futility of Nature's loveliness in a world where everything has its price. "A poet, thou:" he exclaims to his Cousin Clover, and asks:

> What worth, what worth, the whole of all thine art?
> Three-Leaves, instruct me! I am sick of price.

The striking figure of the Course-of-things, browsing, champing and chewing the lovely clover just as it has champed and chewed the loveliness of Dante, Keats, Chopin, Raphael, Lucretius, Omar,

Angelo, Beethoven, Chaucer, Schubert, Shakespeare, Bach, and Buddha, suggests to him the tortuous question: To what end?

> To this no-end that ends,
> These masters wrought, and wept, and sweated blood,
> And burned, and loved, and ached with public shame,
> And found no friends to breathe their loves to, save
> Woods and wet pillows? This was all? This Ox?

In a way, in the post Civil War America, Lanier was a man without a country, without a place to call his own. His "trembling soul" constantly sought to escape from the "terrible towns." It dwelt in his native marshes, in clover fields, among orderly rows of corn, in peaceful groves, in music and poetry. But Want ever brought him back to the ways "whereon capricious Commerce rides" and to where men staked their lives "on games of Buy-and-Sell." He grew tired; grew desperate. Impotently he wailed with the violins of his *Symphony*:

> O Trade! O Trade! would thou wert dead!
> The time needs heart—'tis tired of head.

He pleaded, for himself and for all suffering subjects of a greed-mad monarch:

> Thou Trade! thou king of the modern days!
> Change thy ways,
> Change thy ways;
> Let the sweaty laborers file
> A little while,
> A little while,
> Where Art and Nature sing and smile.
> Trade! is thy heart all dead, all dead?

He pleaded and lost—but he never surrendered.

Lanier's realistic tendency displays itself again in his Southern themes. There is a definite South in his poems—not the South of traditional poetry, but a real South. The marshes of Glynn County, Georgia, the Chattahoochee, the hills of Georgia, the flats of Florida, Texas mocking birds, Tampa robins, Georgia oak, Carolina palm—these are part of his South. Forsaken farms, impoverished planters, local problems, "coquette Cotton," loans and mortgages, Georgia dialect—these, too, are part of his South.

The beauty of his nature poems is pungent with the emotional associations of the man. "Oh, might I through these tears," he writes from the flats of Florida, "But glimpse some hills my Georgia high uprears . . . " His beloved marshes he remembers by the

. . . braided dusks of the oak and woven shades of the vine, . . .

He remembers them because

Ye held me fast in your heart and I held you fast in mine.

Florida oranges become to him "small world-systems in the light," whose "green gold universe" is his.

His nature poems generally are his best. Lanier was genuinely responsive to the mystic moods of nature. He felt a kinship with trees and birds which he could not always feel with the hustling men of the towns. Nature called to him. "In my sleep," he begins that splendid last poem, *Sunrise*, "I was fain of their fellowship, fain

Of the live-oak, the marsh, and the main.
The little green leaves would not let me alone in my sleep; . . .

Nature revived him, inspired him with confidence, with courage. In *The Marshes of Glynn* his spirit

. . . is grown to a lordly great compass within,
That the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes of Glynn
Will work me no fear like the fear they have wrought me of yore
When length was fatigue, and when breadth was but bitterness sore.

Now, unafraid,

To the edge of the wood I am drawn, I am drawn,
Where the gray beach glimmering runs, as a belt of the dawn, . . .

While a few of his mannerisms, such as his labels "Cousin Clover" and "Cousin Corn," affect one as stilted, as poetic gestures, there can be no doubt that his love of nature was sincere, that in truth, as he modestly expressed it,

Yea, all fair forms, and sounds, and lights,
And warmths, and mysteries, and mights,
Of Nature's utmost depths and heights,
—These doth my timid tongue present,

The mannerisms of Lanier spring partly from his tragic personal life and partly from his Southern environment. His struggle to maintain himself at all was so pathetic that an occasional betrayal of his poetic gift, a compromise with the manner current in the periodicals of the day, was inevitable. Lanier himself confessed, in a letter written in 1874, that his poem *My Spring* was not what he had wanted it to be. "Of course," he wrote, "since I have written it to print I cannot make it such as I desire in artistic design: for the forms of to-day require a certain

trim smugness and clean-shaven propriety in the face and dress of a poem, and I must win a hearing by conforming in some degree to these tyrannies, with a view to overturning them in the future. Written so, it is not nearly so beautiful as I would have it; and I therefore have another still in my heart, which I will some day write for myself."

His Southern environment is undoubtedly responsible for a good deal of the prettiness, sentimentality, and moral goodness that often creep into his best of poems. Poetry was after all a "gentle art"—almost synonymous with a "pretty art." One versified smoothly of sweet and gentle things. One forgot this mundane sphere and strove to lift the human soul toward "higher things." This conception of the function of poetry was at war with the fundamental realism of Lanier's Muse, and sometimes it won. For instance, Lanier's use of the word "sweet" sometimes becomes pathetically ludicrous. He has "tremors of sweet-within-sweet," "Sweet Heaven," "dim sweet woods," "the sweet limbs of a girl," "sweetest masters," "sweet seers," "Sweetest Shakespeare," "sweet friends," "a sweet voice," "sweetheart face," "sweet wifely eyes," "sweet stature," "sweet sometime," "sweet Socrates." He has other sentimentalities—"good violets," "fair-faced stars," "skies of poesy."

Possessed of such a delicate and rather feminine attitude toward poetry it is no wonder Lanier failed to discern any essential poetry in Whitman. "Whitman," he wrote in his notes, "is poetry's butcher. Huge raw collops slashed from the rump of poetry, and never mind gristle—is what Whitman feeds our souls with." It never occurred to the gentle flutist from Georgia that he could learn anything from the barbarian from Paumanok. Yet a little bit of rugged Whitmanese would have gone a long way to offset the prim prettiness that sometimes guided Lanier's pen.

But that, of course, was impossible. Ruggedness could not be the quality of a poet dying of consumption, nor of a product of an over-refined, Puritanic milieu. "To feed the soul" was a requisite of poetry. Art had its justification in doing good. Lanier's poems, his best, his most sensuous lines, often suffer from an admixture of moral precepts. The very glooms of his marshes are

> Cool for the dutiful weighing of ill with good;—

Their tolerant plains

> . . . spread and span like the catholic man who hath mightily won
> God out of knowledge and good out of infinite pain . . .

"God's clover" teaches him that "the artist's price" is "some little good of man." The Chattahoochee cannot be persuaded to tarry a while, for

> Downward the voices of Duty call

The Mayflower becomes a symbol of Faith and teaches that

> . . . Freedom is more large than crime
> And Error is more small than time, . . .

The future of the Western world must prove that

> Love is Lord of land and sea.

It is probably because of his insistence on the "good" in art that he found nothing "to eat" in Swinburne whose "service of silver and gold" he liked, nor in William Morris who "caught a crystal cupful of the yellow light of sunset, and persuading himself to dream it wine, drank it with a sort of smile." That the mere undertaking of catching "a crystal cupful of the yellow light of sunset" is worthy of the efforts of any poet was an idea quite foreign to Lanier and to the South of his time. It is interesting to speculate what Lanier would have thought, had his life been prolonged, of a few Southern poets of today; of the Virginian James Branch Cabell, for instance, or of the Louisianian John McClure.

One other characteristic frequently dilutes the pure strain of Lanier's poetry. It is its bookishness. Lanier was a literary scholar of considerable attainment, and his knowledge of universal and English literature creeps into the lines, thoughts, and images of his poems. He sees a "Caliban sea," an "Ariel cloud," the "Desdemona Morn;" the Southern mocking bird is "yon trim Shakespeare on the tree" or his own pet, "Keats;" the tall palmetto is "Bare Dante of these purgatorial sands." He remembers the "Bards, and old bringers-down of flaming news;"—"Father Homer," "Brave Aeschylus," "Worn Dante," "Tense Keats," Langland, Caedmon, Chaucer, Milton, Khayyam, Tennyson. He thinks too often in rhymes and eases his heart "With sonnets to my lady Life." Terms and figures associated with his music also creep in to a disconcerting extent. There is a "low-and-string tension of beauty," "the lute's fixt fret," "the bee's fanfare;" life is a "sea-fugue," love is "sole music master blest."

These mannerisms, however, are mere mannerisms indeed.

They are the restraining legacy of a fond but not overwise South to a native son, loyal of heart but of a somewhat alarming waywardness of mind. They are the excrescences of a time and a tradition requiring more courage to throw off entirely than Lanier could muster. They are the grotesqueries imposed by a stunted and tragic life. Beneath these mannerisms is an essence of real poetry, unmistakable poetry.

There is striking imagery; sharp, vivid little pictures, fresh spontaneous evocations of beauty. Those little leaves whom the poet implores:

> As ye hang with your myriad palms upturned in the air
> Pray me a myriad prayers.

Those "golden globes," his "orange-planets . . . with orbits bright of minstrelsy." The "Young palmer sun." "Sleep . . . Harlequin of Dreams . . . " "Georgia's oaks with moss-beards curled." The "matted miracles of grass." The leaves again

> . . . with hollow palms uplifted high
> To catch the stars' most sacred rain of light:

There is exquisite music, rhythms that march and flow and linger; cadences that sing on in memory.

> By the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes of Glynn.
>
> Music is love in search of a word.
>
> For we are taller than the breadth of night.
>
> . . . a singing with this hand!
>
> Ye lispers, whisperers, singers in storms
> Ye consciences murmuring faiths under forms
>
> The sacramental marsh one pious plain
> Of worship lies.

Within Lanier there were, indeed,

> . . . singing rivulets of rhyme.

WHAT'S RIGHT

A PLAY IN ONE ACT*

By Roland English Hartley

Persons

Miss Sarah Clark
Miss Anna Clark
Paul Reeder
May Nevin
Dr. Folsom

Scene: *The room of the Clark sisters, which is also the office of their boarding house, at eight o'clock in the evening. Center back, a door opens into the hallway. Most of the left half of the room is cut off by a screen which partly hides a bed and dressing table. Against the right wall is a table which serves as a desk, covered with a litter of papers. There is a telephone here. A rocking chair stands before the screen, and a straight-backed chair on each side of the table.*

Miss Sarah Clark *is seated at the table, turning over papers and writing. Her hair is gray and stringy, her face gray and thin. Her sister* Anna *is hovering uncertainly in front of the door.* Anna *is shorter and rounder than* Sarah, *with gentle apologetic eyes. The sisters are dressed almost alike, in pinched blouses and narrow skirts that emphasize* Miss Sarah's *meagerness and* Miss Anna's *shapelessness.*

Anna *opens the door and lets in a burst of noise—the rattle of a cheap piano, the squalling of an uncertain tenor, laughter and loud voices—all the outpouring of a boarding house sitting room in the hour of its highest delightfulness. Whenever the door is opened, throughout the play, we get this synthesis of the gay life of the place.*

Sarah (*sharply*). Keep that door shut, won't you! I'm sick of that racket.

Anna (*closing the door and stepping back into the room*). I'm just listening for the doctor to come down.

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SARAH. I guess he'd have sense enough to come and look for us . . . And if he don't, it won't be any great loss. I'm sure I'm not interested. She just as good as told me to get out of her room.

ANNA. That *was* kind of funny, wasn't it?

SARAH. And I told the doctor, I said: "We'll do everything we can for her. We try to make this a real home for our guests."

ANNA. Yes, of course we would.

SARAH. And then she wanted to talk to him *alone*. She came right out and *said* it.

ANNA. The poor little thing!

SARAH. Poor little thing? Now, Anna, for goodness sake, don't start in on *that!*

ANNA. But she looked so little and white. I don't think she's been feeling well for a long time. I guess that's pretty hard work, standing up all day down there and moving those cases around. She looks so tired all the time now.

SARAH. Well, if she don't feel right, she ought to have a tray in her room. She oughtn't to come down and make a scene like that. Fainting in the dining room! That's the first time that's ever happened in *this* house.

ANNA. She wasn't in the dining room, Sarah.

SARAH (*with irritation*). Well, right at the *door* of it. I don't see the difference.

ANNA. I'm kind of sorry for her.

SARAH. Well, didn't I want to do everything I could for her? And she just as good as put me out of her room.

ANNA. I hope it's nothing serious.

SARAH. Of course it isn't. It's just the nuisance of the thing. Did you see Mrs. Martin's face? Just plain disgusted. She'll be leaving, *next* thing. (*There is a knock at the door.*)

ANNA. There he is now. (*She hurries and opens the door.* REEDER *stands in the doorway. He is a large, heavy man. His round boyish face and mild shy eyes seem scarcely to belong to that great figure.*)

ANNA. Oh . . . we thought it was the doctor.

REEDER (*timidly*). Have you heard . . . how she is?

ANNA. The doctor hasn't come down yet, Mr. Reeder.

REEDER (*moving his hands uncertainly*). If there's anything I can do . . .

SARAH. She don't want any help. She just as good as ordered me out of her room.

REEDER. You'll let me know . . . if there's anything? . . . Maybe I could go out to the drug-store . . . or something.

SARAH (*impatiently*). Yes, yes. We don't know anything yet, I tell you. (REEDER *hesitates a moment, then backs away slowly, shutting the door.*)

ANNA. Wasn't it just like the movies, the way he picked her up and carried her upstairs? Just as easy. She didn't look any bigger than a little baby asleep in his arms.

SARAH (*sniffing*). It makes me sick to see a great big strong man like that so silly over a chit of a girl. (*The telephone rings.* SARAH *answers.*) Yes, yes. . . . . (*Her voice softens.*) Oh, yes, Bert. How are you?

. . . . .

That's good.

. . . . .

Oh, sure. I know that.

. . . . .

Say, that would be great, wouldn't it?

. . . . .

(*Her voice becomes somewhat more doubtful.*) I don't know, Bert. You remember you said last time you'd let me have it back the next week, and now it's . . .

. . . . .

Oh, yes, I know, Bert. Of course that's what we want too . . . Well, I'll see. I guess we can.

. . . . .

Oh, no, Bert. Not that much. Not more than twenty—or twenty-five.

. . . . .

That's all right, Bert. Why don't you ever come to see us any more? It's been weeks since you've been over here.

. . . . .

Yes, I suppose so. Well, come over as soon as you can, won't you?

. . . . .

Oh, yes. (*laughing*) I was forgetting already. You'll be by for it in the morning, won't you?

. . . . .

All right, Bert. Good night. (*She hangs up.*)

ANNA (*who has been listening to the talk with many evidences of*

disapproval). Sarah, you ain't going to lend him any more money?

SARAH. I am.

ANNA. But he didn't give you back that last yet.

SARAH. No, but he explained about it . . . You don't understand, Anna. Bert's got to put up a good appearance. An auto salesman can't dress like a—like a milkman. Going around with those swell people like he does, he's *got* to have money.

ANNA. He knows where to come for it all right.

SARAH. Anna, you make me tired. You go fussing over every sick cat that comes along, and just now you've been wailing over that May Nevin, and now you don't want me to be even decent to your dead brother's own son.

ANNA. We've done a lot for him already.

SARAH. And hasn't he done a lot for us?

ANNA. How?

SARAH. Why, just coming here. Just driving up in those swell new cars and coming in the way he does and talking jolly to everybody. If it wasn't for Bert, I tell you, we'd have lost Miss Ferner, that time last month she was so fussy about her toast—if Bert hadn't just happened to come in that day, and took her for a ride.

ANNA. Women are fools.

SARAH. I can't see that it's being fools to like to ride around with Bert and have a good time. Miss Ferner told me there ain't many fellows can show a girl a good time like Bert can. And that May Nevin of yours that you're making such a fuss about—she seemed to get plenty of fun out of it for a while.

ANNA. I wonder if they had a fight.

SARAH. You mean, because he don't take her out any more? I guess he just got tired of her. And I don't wonder. The idea of Bert wasting his money on *her!* I remember he said one day it wasn't much of a compliment to him, her running around with Reeder like she did. Bert said something about her wanting to play the game both ways. (*There is a knock at the door.* ANNA *moves toward it.*)

ANNA. I guess that's the doctor this time.

SARAH. If it ain't that Reeder again. (ANNA *opens the door, and the doctor steps in. He is a short, trim, gray-haired man. His professional suavity doesn't wholly hide his distress.*)

ANNA. Is it anything serious, doctor?

DOCTOR. Not at all. Or . . . that is . . not serious from a professional standpoint. But . . .

SARAH. What's the matter with her?

DOCTOR. You understand, Miss—Miss Clark, a doctor hasn't the right to violate a patient's confidence. But in this case, I think I'll have to be—technically guilty. The little woman seems so wholly alone. I think you or your sister should be with her.

SARAH. What's the matter with her?

DOCTOR. She is going to be a mother. (*The sisters stare at him.* ANNA *sits down abruptly.*)

SARAH. Impossible!

DOCTOR (*smiling indulgently*). It's nature's way of maintaining the race, you know.

SARAH (*after staring at him in silence for a moment*). But she isn't married.

DOCTOR. I'm afraid nature is a little heedless in that particular. (*He smiles as if he rather approved of nature's heedlessness. There is a pause of a moment, while* SARAH *tries in vain to meet her sister's eye.*)

SARAH. Do you mean . . . right away?

DOCTOR (*smiling even more exasperatingly*). Hardly. A matter of a good many months.

SARAH (*sharply, glad of this chance to punish him for laughing at her*). Well, I guess you needn't wait then. (*The doctor bows in some confusion, and withdraws. The sisters sit for a moment in silence.*)

SARAH (*at length*). Of all things! . . . And to think that Bert was so nice to her!

ANNA. Sarah, what in the world are we going to do?

SARAH. Do? I'm going to get her out of this house so fast it'll make her head swim. How long do you suppose Mrs. Martin would stay under the same roof with a—a thing like that? Or Mr. Fraser and his daughter? Or anybody that's decent? Why, we'd have nobody left at all if they heard about this!

ANNA. Where would she go?

SARAH. That's not for *us* to worry about.

ANNA. But she hasn't any other place.

SARAH. It wouldn't be hard to find one—for the likes of her.

ANNA. You wouldn't put her out like that, Sarah!

SARAH. Wouldn't I? You just watch me . . . I've got a good mind to put that Reeder out too.

ANNA. Mr. Reeder? (*She fumbles with her skirt against the chair.*) You mean you think . . .

SARAH. Think! It don't take a great lot of thinking, does it? . . . I've got a good mind to tell him just what decent people think about that sort of thing.

ANNA. Sarah, you wouldn't talk to . . . a man about that! (SARAH *looks at her with increasing doubt and distress. She sinks back limply in her chair.*)

SARAH. What *shall* we do, Anna? I don't know what to think about it. Nothing like that's ever happened *here* before.

ANNA. We could . . . couldn't we . . . just do nothing?

SARAH (*impatiently*). Yes, and pretty quick, I promise you, we wouldn't have anything *to* do. (*She shakes her head in perplexity.*) I don't know. I don't know. (*Then she sits up with a sudden gesture of relief.*) I tell you. I'll ring up Bert. I'll ask him to come right over. *He'll* know what to do. (*She picks up the phone and gives the number.*) West 4324. (*There is a wait.*) I guess he's gone out. I wish I'd tried to call him right away . . . I wonder if she's ringing the right number? . . . Oh, Bert? . . . Oh, I'm so glad to get you. I was so afraid you'd gone out. Bert, could you come over for just a few minutes? There's something I want to ask you about.

. . . . .

But this is very important, Bert. Couldn't you come for just a little while?

. . . . .

Well, it's awful hard to talk about it this way, Bert. But you see . . . well, one of the girls is—in trouble. We wanted to ask you what we should do.

. . . . .

I don't like to mention names over the wire. But it's . . . well, it's somebody you used to take out riding a good deal.

. . . . .

Yes.

. . . . .

Yes. Maybe so. I guess you know best. Maybe when you come in the morning . . .

. . . . .

Oh, is that so? Well, come as soon as you can, Bert. Good night. (*She hangs up, sits for a moment, then turns slowly to* ANNA.) Bert's not coming. He says a man can't interfere that

way in another man's affair . . . I'm glad I asked him, anyhow.

ANNA. And you'll just let her alone, won't you, Sarah?

SARAH (*not seeming to hear*). Bert's not coming over in the morning either. He says he won't want that money for awhile . . . Well I guess I'll just have to do it myself.

ANNA. What do you mean?

SARAH. First thing I'm going up and tell that hussy to get out. Next thing I'm going to tell that Reeder that if he's got *any* decency left in him, he'll look out for her.

ANNA. Sarah, you can't talk to a man like that! (*There is a knock. The sisters stare at each other in extreme discomfort. The knock is repeated.*)

SARAH. Go open the door, Anna.

ANNA. I—can't. (SARAH *goes stalking to the door and flings it open.* REEDER *is standing there:*)

SARAH. Come in, Mr. Reeder. (*He enters slowly, somewhat taken aback by the ceremony of her manner.*)

REEDER. I saw the doctor going. That was quite a while ago. I thought maybe . . .

SARAH. Sit down over there, Mr. Reeder. (*He takes the indicated place doubtfully.*)

ANNA. I think I'll have to go out in the kitchen for a few minutes.

SARAH. You stay *right* where you are. (ANNA *gets her sewing bag from the table and, back in her rocking chair, begins a distracted sea ch for something or other.*)

REEDER. Is there—anything I could do—for Miss Nevin?

SARAH. Yes; there's plenty of things you can do. Anna and I were just going to send for you.

REEDER (*moving uneasily in his chair*). Is it—something serious?

SARAH. Yes; very serious. (ANNA *drops her ball of darning cotton and bends over to pursue it about the legs of her chair.*)

REEDER. I'd do anything in the world I could for her.

SARAH. We knew you were kind of crazy about her. That's why we wanted to talk to you about this. (ANNA *has regained her darning cotton, and now she drops her scissors.*)

REEDER. I been trying for a year to get her to marry me. She oughtn't to be doing that heavy work like she does, lifting those things around. And when I tell her that, she says: "Well, I guess I don't need anybody taking care of me just yet a while." She's so darned independent, Miss Clark. But then I guess it's

because I'm . . . well, I'm kind of crude compared to her. My hands—(*He lifts them slowly and looks at them.*) I don't seem to be able to ever get 'em clean. And (*with a new bitterness*) I can't come driving up in a shiny car. And that's what girls seem to care about more than anything else . . . I keep begging her and begging her, but it don't do no good. And now I guess she's just worked herself sick.

SARAH. No; it ain't that. (ANNA's *work-bag goes bodily to the floor.*) For goodness sake, Anna! Can't you be quiet? You make me nervous, everlastingly dropping things.

REEDER. I wish I could do something for her.

SARAH. You've only got to do what's right by her. (REEDER *stares at her in perplexity.* ANNA *begins to cry softly.*)

ANNA. You've just got to be good to her, Mr. Reeder. I can't bear to think of her having to go away. Not knowing anybody. I'd let her stay, but Sarah . . .

SARAH. Anna, what's the sense in being ridiculous? You know as well as I do she's got to go. And if Mr. Reeder's any kind of a man . . . (*She leaves the sentence in the air.* REEDER *stares from one sister to the other, crosses and uncrosses his legs, leans forward in his chair, leans back.* SARAH *gets up abruptly and crosses ths room to shake* ANNA *by the shoulder.*)

SARAH. Be quiet, Anna! Don't be a fool!

ANNA (*whimpering*). I don't see how men can be such—beasts. (REEDER *jumps up and comes close to them.*)

REEDER. Beasts? Say, what's the matter, anyhow? Why don't you tell me what's the matter? (ANNA *begins to cry more loudly.*)

SARAH (*to* REEDER). Go on away. Don't stand there like that. Can't you see you're scaring her?

REEDER (*angrily*). Does she think I'm dangerous or something?

SARAH. She knows what you are. We found *that* out, all right.

REEDER. I don't know what you're talking about.

SARAH (*turning in her nervousness to* ANNA, *who is really quite quiet now*). There now, Anna; don't make such a fuss.

REEDER (*staring at them dully*). You're trying to put something over on me.

SARAH (*still to* ANNA, *with unnecessary irritation*). For goodness sake, Anna, can't you shut up? How'm I going to talk to Mr. Reeder?

REEDER. Say, you tell me what you got to say, now . . . What's the matter with May?

SARAH (*facing him suddenly*). You needn't make out you don't know anything about it. We ain't fools. (*He stares at her for a long moment.*)

REEDER. You don't mean, Miss Sarah . . . ? It ain't . . . (*She stares back at him steadily and accusingly.*)

ANNA (*beginning to sob again*). The poor little thing!

REEDER. (*turning away, laughing bitterly*). You say you ain't fools. But you think *I'm* one, don't you? (*He begins walking heavily back and forth across the floor while* SARAH *proceeds with a somewhat absent-minded comforting of her sister.*)

SARAH. There now, Anna. Everything's going to be all right. Mr. Reeder's a gentleman.

REEDER (*stopping abruptly beside her*). But I ain't *crazy*, I tell you.

ANNA. I should think you'd *want* to be good to her.

REEDER (*stopping again in his pacing*). I got to see her.

SARAH (*graciously*). Why, of course, Mr. Reeder. I knew you'd do what was right.

REEDER. Can't we go up right now to see her—up to her room?

SARAH. Most certainly not. There's been enough strange goings-on already without that. I'll go right up and bring her down. (*She moves toward the door.* ANNA *springs up.*)

ANNA. No, Sarah. Let me go. *You* stay here, Sarah. I'll go. (SARAH *turns back with a shrug and* ANNA *goes out.*)

SARAH (*turning over papers on the table and assuming a light worldly air*). Anna gets so upset over these little things. I kept telling her everything would be all right.

REEDER (*facing her across the room*). I want to know your nephew's address.

SARAH. Bert's? Why, certainly. But . . .

REEDER. I haven't seen him for a long time. I . . . I owe him . . . something.

SARAH (*writing on a slip of paper*). Well, I'm sure it's very good of you to think of it. (*She hands over the slip.*) There it is. But I hope he'll be *here* again before long.

REEDER (*staring at the bit of paper*). I . . . may be going away, and I wanted to . . . to pay him.

SARAH. Now, that's certainly thoughtful of you, Mr.

Reeder. (*As the door begins to open they both start and move about nervously.* Anna *enters alone.*)

Anna. She won't come.

Sarah. Oh, she won't, won't she? Well, we'll just see about that. (*She starts for the door.*)

Anna. Sarah, I wish you wouldn't. If you could just see her there. She was lying in the dark, all crumpled up on the bed.

Sarah. And I guess she's got her shoes on too—on that clean spread!

Anna. Let her alone, Sarah, won't you, please?

Sarah (*at the door*). I'll give her the choice of coming down here or getting out of the house this very minute.

Reeder. Why can't I come up with you, Miss Clark?

Sarah. And have everybody in the place gaping and sniffing and chattering about it? No thank you! I told you I'd had about enough of that! (*She pulls open the door.*)

Anna (*hurrying toward her*). Let me go with you, Sarah.

Reeder (*gravely*). You don't need to be scared of me, Miss Anna. (Sarah *pushes her sister back into the room and goes out.* Anna *hurries to her sewing bag.*)

Reeder. You're good to—be good to her, Miss Anna.

Anna (*fast and nervously*). Sarah's not as mean as she talks. Lots of times it's her that's the soft one. We had a fuss to-night, just a little while ago, because I was kind of sore at Bert, and she was taking his part.

Reeder (*sharply*). About—this?

Anna (*in a great flurry*). Oh, about something . . . I can't tell you. It's just something between him and us.

Reeder. He's a dirty cur!

Anna. Why . . . Mr. Reeder! Why, I . . .

Reeder (*moving abruptly away and brushing his hand across his face*). I don't know what I'm talking about.

Anna. That certainly *was* a strange thing to say, Mr. Reeder.

Reeder (*letting himself into a chair and covering his face*). Damn it all! I don't know what we're going to do. (Anna *gets up startled and moves toward the door. It opens and* Sarah *ushers in* May Nevin. *She is a slight little thing in white blouse and black skirt, both much crumpled. Strands of wet-looking hair hang about her white face and swollen eyes. At the door she holds back and murmurs, "No! No!"*)

Sarah (*sternly*). Go on in. It's all right. Mr. Reeder's here.

MAY. No! I won't! I won't! (*She tries to escape, but* SARAH, *blocking the way, forces her into the room and closes the door.*)

REEDER. Didn't you tell her—I was here?

SARAH. Now you just let *me* take care of this! (ANNA *goes to the girl, takes her two hands, and leads her to a chair. Seated, the girl covers her face with her hands.*)

SARAH. Now, don't be foolish, Miss Nevin. This is no time for nonsense.

REEDER (*stepping forward slowly*). I'll talk to her, Miss Clark. (*He stands a moment looking down at the girl.*) May, I . . . I want to talk to you . . . about this. (*She turns her head away from him. He gives the sisters a beseeching glance.*) Say, if we could just talk . . . alone . . . for a minute . . . (ANNA *moves away a trifle but* SARAH *does not budge an inch.*)

SARAH. There's been enough of that sort of thing already.

REEDER (*turning slowly back to the girl*). I don't know how I can . . . talk about it, this way, May . . . I hate to see you like this . . . I want to . . . to take care of you . . . just like I always wanted. (MAY *little by little uncovers her eyes and searches his face long and appraisingly. At last she gives a shrug of impatience.*)

MAY. You know you'd like to choke me.

REEDER. No, honest, May, I'm . . . that's not how I feel.

MAY. Oh, go on away and let me alone.

REEDER. Listen, May . . . I want us to . . . get married.

SARAH (*triumphantly*). There, you see, Miss Nevin, everything's going to be all right.

MAY (*looking from one to another*). I guess he don't know about—everything.

SARAH (*gaily*). Oh yes, he knows. We told him, and he's going to do what's right.

MAY. What's right! (*She gives a harsh, bitter laugh. After a moment she turns to* REEDER, *with that same slow questioning look.*) I can't see through this . . . You must think I'm even rottener than I am.

REEDER (*stubbornly*). I'm going to marry you.

MAY (*with a weary gesture*). Oh, what's the use?

REEDER (*lowering his voice*). Do you want to marry—him?

MAY. Him? . . . It's pretty late to be thinking about that, isn't it?

SARAH. Who are you talking about now?

REEDER (*quickly*). That's *our* business.

SARAH. I guess I got a right to know what's going on in my own house.

ANNA (*timidly, to* SARAH). Maybe . . . she likes Bert.

SARAH. Bert! (*She gives a harsh, mocking laugh.*) Bert! Is she fool enough to think Bert would ever marry *her?*

MAY (*bitterly*). Oh, I was a fool, all right!

REEDER. Don't talk about that any more, May.

MAY (*facing him angrily*). Well, who started all this talk, anyway?

REEDER (*patiently*). I mean . . . don't talk about . . . him . . . They don't understand how things are.

SARAH. Not understand! . . . You ought to be thankful I didn't put the two of you right out!

MAY. Why *don't* you put me out? Did I want to come down here and get mixed up in all this?

REEDER. I'm not going to let you just go away by yourself.

MAY. I *won't* stay here!

SARAH. As if you could!

REEDER. I don't see why I can't take care of you, May . . . if I want to.

MAY. You'd get over wanting to mighty quick.

REEDER. No, I wouldn't, May.

MAY (*twisting restlessly in her chair*). Oh, go on away and don't keep bothering me. Can't you see I've got enough to worry about, without this?

SARAH. You little fool, don't you see you've got to do what Mr. Reeder wants?

MAY (*crying out*). Go on away and let me alone, all of you! I'm getting sick of this.

REEDER (*taking her hand*). Don't take on like that, now, May.

MAY (*pulling her hand away*). And I don't want to be pawed any more, either.

REEDER (*stepping back*). I don't see what you want to take it out on me for.

MAY (*in a new softer tone, her eyes following him as he moves away*). You know you think I'm no good.

REEDER (*facing back to her*). We got no right to be holding ourselves above you. We ain't so perfect, May, none of us.

SARAH (*indignantly*). Well, Mr. Reeder, if you mean to insinuate . . . !

REEDER (*turning to her angrily*). *Can't* you be quiet and leave us alone?

MAY (*in the new gentler voice, watching* REEDER *closely*). I guess there's no use talking about it any more.

REEDER. Yes, there is, May . . . You know how I've always . . . felt about you . . . and it's . . . just the same . . . . . now. (*When he takes her hand she does not withdraw it, but keeps her eyes on his face with that same studying gaze.*)

REEDER. You know that place I told you about, up in Stockton? We'll go up there. We'll get out of this rotten place here.

SARAH. Well, now, Mr. Reeder . . . !

REEDER (*facing her sharply*). Well, why don't you clear out then and give us a chance to talk? How do you expect us to get anything settled with you hanging over us like a dam . . . like a dam . . . why, it seems like the whole family of you is just good for nothing! (*He catches sight of* ANNA'S *hurt face.*) Say, I'm sorry, Miss Anna . . . But can't you *make* her go away?

ANNA. Maybe, Sarah . . .

SARAH. Now, I'm going to stay right here and get this thing settled right.

REEDER (*turning back to the girl*). May, don't you see we got to go somewhere out of here if we want to talk about this?

MAY (*quietly*). Maybe we better get it settled while we're here.

REEDER (*eagerly*). You'll marry me all right then, won't you, May?

MAY (*with a fling of her hand*). Oh, I don't know! I don't know!

SARAH. It's the only decent thing to do.

MAY (*to* REEDER). You're sure you wouldn't be sorry right away?

REEDER. I don't change that easy, May.

SARAH. I'm sure he'll be real good to you, Miss Nevin.

MAY. I'm so tired I can't think straight.

REEDER. You don't have to think about it, May . . . I tell you it's the best thing to do.

MAY (*wearily*). Maybe it is.

REEDER. We'll go right up to Stockton.

MAY. I don't think I'd like to live in a dinky place like that.

REEDER (*after a moment*). You wouldn't want to stay here in the city, would you?

MAY. We could come back, couldn't we?

REEDER (*doubtfully*). If you wanted to.

MAY. I'd want to, all right.

SARAH. We'd always be glad to have you here.

REEDER (*angrily*). First thing we're going to do is get *out* of here . . . Come on, May.

MAY (*hesitating, as he reaches out a hand to her*). Where are we going?

REEDER (*wondering at her doubt*). Why, I guess . . . We can get married . . . now, can't we?

MAY. Right away?

REEDER. Sure. Right away . . . That's what we want, ain't it?

MAY (*rising slowly and shakily from the chair*). All right, then. (REEDER *leads her slowly from the room When the door has closed upon them, the sisters stare at each other a moment.*)

SARAH (*at length*). Well, Anna, I think I managed that pretty good. (*There is a knock at the door and* REEDER *enters without waiting for a summons.*)

REEDER. Miss Clark, you're not going to say anything about all this!

SARAH (*pleasantly*). Why, Mr. Reeder! You know we *never* discuss our guests' affairs.

REEDER. You can just tell 'em that May and me are married and going to live—somewhere else.

SARAH. We'll be real sorry to lose you and Miss Nevin. If you change your mind about going . . .

REEDER. Oh, we're going all right! (*And he goes quickly. As the door closes,* SARAH *sits down abruptly.* ANNA *stands staring at the blank wall.*)

SARAH (*after a moment*). You see, Anna, I told you that was the only way to do: to just come right out and say things plain.

ANNA (*after another silence*). I hope they'll be happy.

SARAH (*staring at her*). What's that got to do with it?

CURTAIN

THE TRUTH ABOUT NEGRO POETRY

By Elizabeth Eldridge

It is time some one exploded the fallacious theories current now about Negro poetry. All through college and since, when any one troubled to discuss the subject, we have been told that Negro poetry is characterized by distinctive rhythms which were the former natural expression of the primitive Ethiopian in music and dance. Modern theorists read into Negro poetry the weird gyrations of a tribal ceremony enacted to the solemn music of tom-toms. Vachel Lindsay's poem, *The Congo*, has done as much, perhaps, as any one other thing to popularize this theory. "Boomlay, boomlay, boomlay, boom" is now held to be the inspiration of every poetic rhythm; although if this be so, then "Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo" has indeed hoo-dooed us.

I was educated at a Southern university where discussions of the Negro and his achievements are, of course, taboo; but when an occasional professor dared the barrier of prejudice in class, he always advanced the so-called Primitive Theory in his lectures. Curious to see how much truth lay behind this assumption, I prepared a questionnaire which I gave to almost three hundred students and a few venturesome faculty members. First, I asked for a list of Negro poets, musicians, artists, and statesmen. The ignorance which these answers revealed showed that the field in which I was working was a virgin one. Practically every one denied that the Negro had any culture whatsoever. A few mentioned Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Booker T. Washington occasionally, Phillis Wheatley once, and sharing honors with her, Carl Van Vechten, Joel Chandler Harris, and Uncle Remus. This ignorance, although deplorable otherwise, was ideal for the purpose of this experiment. With no previous introduction to Negro poetry, the answers the students furnished could not be biased by what they knew before; still, if there were any salient characteristics in Negro poetry, they could have recognized them at once. Since they were a college group, it is reasonable to suppose that their critical ability would be more highly developed than in most other groups. Southerners (reared by Negro mammies in many cases), they, better than any one else, should be able to discriminate Negro characteristics immediately.

The second part of the questionnaire included passages from the better Negro poets; among them Paul Lawrence Dunbar, William S. Braithwaite, Benjamin G. Brawley, Phillis Wheatley, James Weldon Johnson, and Fenton Johnson. Of course, I had to be careful not to include poems on racial problems, for their source would have been obvious, but I did include several dialect poems. The remaining selections were from representative English and American poets. The passages were not too well-known and were drawn mainly from the modern poets in order that the passages might be as similar to those of the first group as possible. From the standard poets there was one selection each from Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, Shelley, Keats, and Byron.

The students were asked, first, to eliminate all the poems that they could recognize or identify positively. Then they were asked to indicate on the remainder whether they were the work of a Negro or a white man and give their reason. In cases where it was possible they also supplied the probable author of the selection. I told them the purpose of the experiment but took care not to mention the Primitive Theory, so that they would not use it as the basis of their judgment. The questionnaire was given orally and in person to be sure that it was done conscientiously and to allow those who answered the opportunity to read the selections aloud if they wished. This gave them the opportunity to discover any characteristic rhythms which were not apparent to the eye.

The answers varied so widely that it was practically impossible to tabulate any results. The experiment did demonstrate conclusively, however, that, if there were any peculiar characteristics in Negro poetry, they were not apparent to the average reader. Not one of the papers had a score of over sixty-three per cent correct and very few made over fifty. According to all the laws of chance, they had a fifty-fifty probability of guessing the answer correctly as there were only two alternatives; therefore, to prove the Primitive Theory, at the very least, half of the papers should have made a score around seventy-five per cent. This they failed to do.

Some of the replies were amusing besides proving the insufficiency of the theory. Shelley's *The Cloud* was ascribed to a Negro writer because of its primitive swaying rhythm! Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, Frost, Dowson, Oscar Wilde, Browning, Longfellow, and Kipling were also placed in the category of Negro writers quite frequently. Amy Lowell and Longfellow

disputed first honors, but just what negroid quality they have in common is not apparent. I expected to find Lindsay's *The Congo* in the category of Negro productions quite often, but it was almost universally recognized and had to be discredited. However, Bayard Taylor's *Bedouin Song*, Shelley's *Dirge*, Tennyson's *Bugle Song* from *The Princess*, W. E. Henley's *Invictus*, and every dialect poem were almost always ascribed to Negro writers. Perhaps, the students considered them negroid because they were written in dialect or with a strong rhythmic swing. The poems that were the work of Negroes were as often ascribed to white writers.

The results of this experiment seem to explode the Primitive Theory altogether. It is true that where music is concerned the Negro may still have melodies that are suggestive of the ceremonies of the native tribes, probably because music can be an uneducated emotional response. To write sophisticated poetry, however, requires a certain background of culture and instruction. The influences of English literature and education have directed the Negro in channels no different from ours. There is no more of the primitive left in the educated Negro than there is of the Neanderthal man in us. His poetry blurs with ours. Its rhythms are no different; its peculiarities exist only in the minds of anxious theorists. Soon, let us hope, the Primitive Theory will be relegated to the past with other outgrown but time-honored hypotheses.

—o—

SURRENDER

By Vigliano Zullo

This is the mass and awkward dusty gesture
Of our love. Commingled with the past
And passing memories there is the fast
And quickened incarnate today,—a mixture
Sweet and bitter, whose elements' fertile pasture
Were western winds amuck in mighty blast,
And scarlet wests, and desolate and last
And lovely star, and in the poplar's posture.

Do what you will with it. A crude compound,
Pliable and still soft it is; and should
You care to fashion it for future-hood
Be not too careful for the shape and sound
Of it, but rather mould a core that fate,
And time and God can never penetrate.

A GROUP OF POEMS

By Frank Ankenbrand, Jr.

FIREFLIES IN EBONY

I

Song to a Dying World

You are old with your desert baldness
And deep canyon wrinkles;
Even the oceans of the world
Have become briny and bitter
With the passing years.

II

Sea Monster

Ocean,
You are an octopus
Embracing the world
In your river tentacles.

III

Vesuvius

Centuries
Must come and roll away
Before you can eject
The evil that was Rome's.

CITY LAMP LIGHTER

PHILADELPHIA

What weary arms are these that lift and light
A friendly glow that smiles upon the dirty yards
Where roses try in vain to live and grow?
His is a mind grown weak with dreaming
Of Italy's purple misted fields and mountains,
And dreams of olive orchards linger in his smile.
Some one surely blew these dreams
Within this shaggy head!
What angel's prolonged kiss could match
The far away dreamy look that lights his eyes
As he goes singing down the alley ways of life?

RED ANTS IN AMBER

I

Earthquake Scolding

God takes the earth in a mighty grip
And shakes it thoroughly for its impishness.

II

Galloping Fairies

I have been riding
Among the jewels of the world
Astride my humming bird steed.

III

Dawn Death

Four men are dying,
Four men are trying,
Like four butterflies
To kiss one white rose
Before the dawn dies.

IV

Autumn Bridge

The world plays cards
With Jupiter and Mars,
Spreading their rainbow hands
Upon the jade coverlets of the forests.

CAPTURED MOMENT

And the sun shattered the sixteen ripply panes into silver glory
And like sunlight under water ran as so many wavy fingers into the four corners of the room.
The crazy quilt in its motley colors lay like a heap of so many fruit skins by the bed.
The four carved posts of the bed were unlit maple tapers.
The chintz curtains rustled a brief prayer of adoration.
You lay on the white sheets, a dream of curves, a symphony of whiteness
With rich pink shadows melting into lovely purples, you were an unwritten song.
And the wind and the sun and my thoughts ran their strong adoring fingers

Over the curves, over the secrets, and even into the red cup of your heart.
In that flash your eyes became keyholes, and my soul the key;
And I unlocked and read, and I was amazed and overjoyed with what I saw and discovered
In the sunlight and wind, under the sloping walls, on the bed,
Beside the crazy quilt on the floor.

●●●●●●

THE STRANGER BY THE LAKE

By Margaret Ward

I met a stranger by the lake
One dusk.
The sky was filled with rose,
And the lake with roaring rhythm
White tipped.
And though the air was cold, and the spray,
I forgot to be.
I saw the lines about the stranger's eyes
Above his smile.
Our words flowed easily,
As clear as the nectar
Of a mountain grotto,
As simple
As a peasant's tender laugh. No barriers were there
Before, behind, and sympathy was free.
Soon I left the stranger by the lake
Never again to see him, though often
I thought of him, and sighed faintly.

Yet as the hours fly over me
With trains of mud and grey mist,
A thought I have
Of perfection,
Though scarcely more than a seashell
In a dream.

A TRILOGY

By Rose Drake

I. PRESCIENCE

Narrow the Dog-star finds his morning bed
and drifts to vaster, sombre regions fled—

Hail Death!
Pitch-black Death!
I unspun your message very long ago—
Immemorial it was—
I traced your shadowy steps
When my feet were bleeding in the winter snow .

Time when the purple hills of night
Were in my wake, and I clomb the steep
Where still and unnamed flowers lay asleep . . .

My voice will break the tremendous
Silence of your might!
I come! I come! . . . sans hope, sans fear, sans trust—
Albeit, doubtful,—dark disdainful Friend—
If come I must!

Tell me!
Can you quicken a Song from muted lips
That Life had held too long—
Lifting to sweet refrain or nobler hymn;
Or find the broken pieces to Life's paradigm?

Answer!
If past the Veil will better be
Than still to ponder Life's disparity?

Strange Foe . . .
I think I understand . . .

There is a perfume some crushed flowers disseminate
Those mystic dream-flowers come to bloom too late.

Ah, me . . . there is a serpent in my hand!

II. STRANGE MONOLOGUE

The world is torn with conflicts and with doubts
And little children's cries
And wars and hunger, nakedness, and old men's tears
And weariness and thirst and twisted lies—
Now is the world torn with wars and bleeding
And with fears!

I cried to Him
Until my voice swept beyond the *Mystery*
Transcending the labyrinth of time,
And rang, echoing through corridors
Of endless endless years—
That He might hear me . . .

Pray guide my steps! Can yonder *Light* unfold
The height, the depth, the mystic meekness of my soul?

Suddenly
Without even a stir of wings or a sound
I knew He was at my side . . . I found
The *Hem of His Garment*—
And being filled with both joy and sorrow
(as through half sun and tears the rainbow is)
. . . I wept.

———————

I know, my child, I come!
For yet before you cried—
With outstretched arms
I AM! I come!
Let there be peace upon the earth!

I am all Life, all Life and Beauty—
Closer than breath—
I am all Love, all Hope Eternal
Between the frail quick and death.

Above sometimes the rainbow crowns the sky:
The sea translates the glory from on high—
Wrought are the star-winged heavens for a sign:
My feet still tread the waters
And the mist is mine!

There . . rest so on my bosom while you weep . . .
(*You are so weary?*)
. . . I will say a prayer for you
. . . And you shall fall asleep.

Cast now the terrors of day
In the soul's bleeding fire . . .
Hear the soft trumpets of nightfall
And nature's sweet lyre!

Look! I think Some One you loved
In God's Holy Blue
Studded this curtain tonight
Thinking of you . . .

Now and Forever I AM!
When clouds veil *My Face*
Watch how the Moon plants her steps
Up the heavens
With infinite grace.

Now in the cool of the evening
Gently the dew tips
Sleepy eyelids with silver
And rose petals rest on still lips . . .

There is dim music
As from soft muted strings . . .
And music from the trembling heart of things . . .

Somewhere I hear the night wind's fretful call
And hear echoes in some nameless valley
Rise and fall . . .

(I am walking down the valley across the fields of pain
and mounting up the hills of light to set the sun again)

Can you not understand?

Come, dear one! Arise!
(Afraid?) . . . Yes,—I know—
But it is only a swift dark to seal forever

The star dust in your eyes—
Now—Can you reach *My Hand?*

III. VALE

A dreamer lost between two worlds
woke from a sleep to sleep
and to the *Lone One* beside him said,
"Thy Truce will I keep!"

He stretched his hand
beyond the Star of Even.
He reached to find
where was the Gate to Heaven . . .

This is the one who lay bleeding.
His face is still startled in pain,
His eyes were blinded in star dust:

Tread soft! . . . . . .he sleepeth again!
(Night, drop your curtain of starry lace
and tenderly veil the dreamer's face)

Now that the song is ended
and the Cup of Trembling gone—
find where the path is bended
where the wounded bird is flown!

Now is the Silver Cord loosened
and the bird with the broken wing
will come again on the morrow
when the air stirs blossomy things . . . .

It is strange that men to whom life is a joke find comfort in women who find it a prayer.—*Rudyard Kipling.*

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